

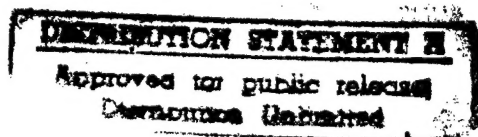
*Indochina Monographs*

# The Cambodian Incursion

by  
*Brig. Gen. Tran Dinh Tho*



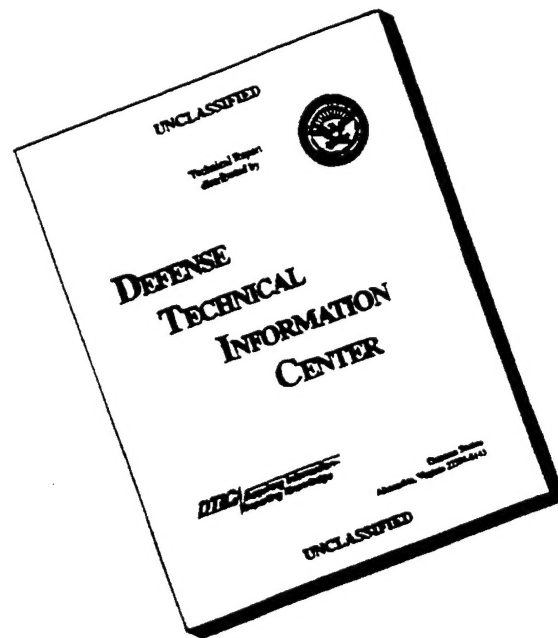
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by  
*Brig. Gen. Tran Dinh Tho*



U.S. ARMY CENTER OF MILITARY HISTORY  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

## Indochina Monographs

This is one of a series published by the U.S. Army Center of Military History. They were written by officers who held responsible positions in the Cambodian, Laotian, and South Vietnamese armed forces during the war in Indochina. The General Research Corporation provided writing facilities and other necessary support under an Army contract with the Center of Military History. The monographs were not edited or altered and reflect the views of their authors--not necessarily those of the U.S. Army or the Department of Defense. The authors were not attempting to write definitive accounts but to set down how they saw the war in Southeast Asia.

Colonel William E. Le Gro, U.S. Army, retired, has written a forthcoming work allied with this series, Vietnam: From Cease-Fire to Capitulation. Another book, The Final Collapse by General Cao Van Vien, the last chairman of the South Vietnamese Joint General Staff, will be formally published and sold by the Superintendent of Documents.

Taken together these works should provide useful source materials for serious historians pending publication of the more definitive series, the U.S. Army in Vietnam.

JAMES L. COLLINS, JR.  
Brigadier General, USA  
Chief of Military History

## Preface

For several years Cambodia, under the leadership of Prince Norodom Sihanouk, had condoned the use of part of its territory by the Vietnamese Communists for infiltration routes and logistic bases. These bases supported enemy activities in South Vietnam's Military Regions 3 and 4 and a significant part of Military Region 2 but were protected because of Cambodia's declared neutrality. However, the change in government on 18 March 1970 provided South Vietnam and the United States the opportunity to neutralize and disrupt much of the enemy logistic system across the border. Sanctioned by the new Cambodian government and approved by the Presidents of the Republic of Vietnam and the United States, South Vietnamese and U.S. forces launched combined operations into Cambodia's border area from 30 April to 30 June 1970.

As the Assistant Chief of Staff J3 of the Joint General Staff, RVNAF, I participated in the combined planning for these historic operations with military representatives from Cambodia and the United States and then monitored the operations constantly for the Chairman JGS. In conducting my analysis I have relied on my personal involvement and observations as J3 and interviews with former members of the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces.

To provide desired information concerning Khmer participation and actions taken by military elements of the United States Embassy in Phnom Penh during these cross-border operations, I am most fortunate to have contributions from two supporting authors. Lieutenant General Sak Sutsakhan, the last Chief of State and Chief of the Khmer Armed

Forces General Staff, has authored Chapter VII. Colonel Harry O. Amos, U.S. Army Retired has contributed Appendix C.

In the preparation of this monograph, I am particularly indebted to General Cao Van Vien, former Chairman of the Joint General Staff, and Lieutenant General Dong Van Khuyen, who commanded the Central Logistics Command at the time of the Cambodian Incursion, for their valuable guidance. I am also grateful for the critical remarks and suggestions contributed by Lieutenant General Ngo Quang Truong, former commander of IV and I Corps, and Major General Nguyen Duy Hinh, the last commander of the 3d ARVN Infantry Division. Finally, Colonel Hoang Ngoc Lung, the former Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence of the JGS, has provided his authoritative expertise on matters concerning the enemy.

I am also personally indebted to Lieutenant Colonel Chu Xuan Vien and Ms. Pham Thi Bong. Lt. Colonel Vien, the last Army Attache serving at the Vietnamese Embassy in Washington, D.C., has done a highly professional job of translating and editing that helps impart unity of style and organization to the manuscript. Ms. Bong, a former Captain in the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces and also a former member of the Vietnamese Embassy staff, spent long and arduous hours, typing, editing and in the administrative preparation of my manuscript in final form.

McLean, Virginia  
15 September 1978

Tran Dinh Tho  
Brigadier General, ARVN

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## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

#### *The Friendly Situation Prior to the Incursion*

The situation throughout South Vietnam in the early months of 1970 was one of continuing improvement, dating back to the introduction of United States combat troops into the war during 1965. This was in marked contrast to the dismally bleak prospects of the Republic of Vietnam in late 1964 and early 1965 when few believed that the new nation could escape Communist conquest.

To counter the RVN and U.S. battlefield successes, North Vietnam switched strategy in 1967, and conceived a bold strike at the cities in order to liberate the countryside. Executed during the 1968 Tet holidays, this offensive strike at the cities of South Vietnam had unexpected consequences for both sides. To our enemy, it was a tragic military defeat. Not only had his General Offensive - General Uprising failed but he also lost significant amounts of weapons and many human lives. In addition, his infrastructure suffered extensive damage. On the RVN side, the population felt greatly stimulated by the enemy's defeat; morale and self-assurance grew. The GVN took advantage of this opportunity to call reservists to active duty and decreed partial mobilization. Popular response to military duty was enthusiastic. The American people, however, reacted adversely to the Vietnam war, apparently under the influence of press, radio and TV reports. It was perhaps this animosity toward the war that influenced President Johnson to order the cessation of U.S. bombing above the 19th parallel on 3 March 1968. At the same time, he announced his decision not to seek a second term in the November 1968 presidential elections. Subsequently, during April 1968, the United States and North Vietnam agreed to negotiate for peace.

In South Vietnam, the RVNAF continued clearing the enemy from all populous areas. At the same time, the Joint General Staff (JGS), RVNAF, requested the U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) for an increase in the RVNAF force structure and new equipment. An initial 820,000 force structure plan was approved by the United States, along with projects to equip the RVNAF with new weapons such as the M-16 rifle, M-60 machine gun and LAW rocket. Additional equipment, such as M-41 tanks, AN/PRC-25 radio sets and 105-mm howitzers, was also made available, partly to replace war-weary items and partly to equip newly-activated units.

In early 1969, formal peace talks began in Paris, with the participation of the U.S., the RVN, North Vietnam and the NLF. These talks failed to bring about any concrete results because Communist negotiators used the conference table primarily as a forum for propaganda. They persistently demanded complete U.S. withdrawal from South Vietnam, removal of the constitutional government of the RVN and self-determination by the South Vietnamese people as to their own political regime.

At the Midway Conference of 8 June 1969, therefore, a joint communique issued by the U.S. and the RVN presidents emphasized both countries' agreement to the principle of "self-determination without interference." In addition, President Nixon announced the first increment of U.S. withdrawal involving 25,000 troops and the U.S. determination to emphasize the expansion, improvement and modernization of the RVNAF.

Vietnamization, which consisted primarily of modernizing and improving the RVNAF, was, in fact, initiated in 1968, with a succession of modified force structure plans.<sup>1</sup> The so-called "Midway Package," which was approved by the U.S. Department of Defense as a result of the Midway Conference, raised the total RVNAF force structure to 953,673 for FY-1970 and 992,837 for FY-1971. These plans were aimed at

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<sup>1</sup>For a more complete description of Vietnamization see Vietnamization and the Cease-Fire by Major General Nguyen Duy Hinh, in this series.

developing the RVNAF into a modern and balanced military force, capable of supporting itself in combat after the withdrawal of U.S. troops. The plans included, therefore, increases in strength for the ARVN, VNAF and VNN and all service support and logistic elements. To provide better support for the pacification program, the Regional and Popular Forces (RF/PF) were also expanded and modernized. By late 1969, these territorial forces were being issued the same modern basic infantry weapons as the regular ARVN units.

Exploiting further the RVNAF success during the 1968 general offensives, the GVN initiated a three-month accelerated pacification program for the last quarter of 1968 and a similar program for 1969. As a result, by the end of 1969, population control had risen to 92% as compared to 67.2% for the period prior to the 1968 Tet offensive. By contrast, confusion reigned among enemy ranks after their defeat. During 1969, a total of 47,000 enemy personnel rallied to the GVN, compared to 23,000 during 1968. Aided by improved security across the country, the GVN resettled or returned to their home villages in excess of 1.5 million people displaced by the war. Most significantly, the GVN-initiated People's Self-Defense program received wide acceptance. Approximately 2.5 million people volunteered to join the program, pushed by their eagerness to protect their own communities. They were equipped with over 400,000 assorted individual weapons.

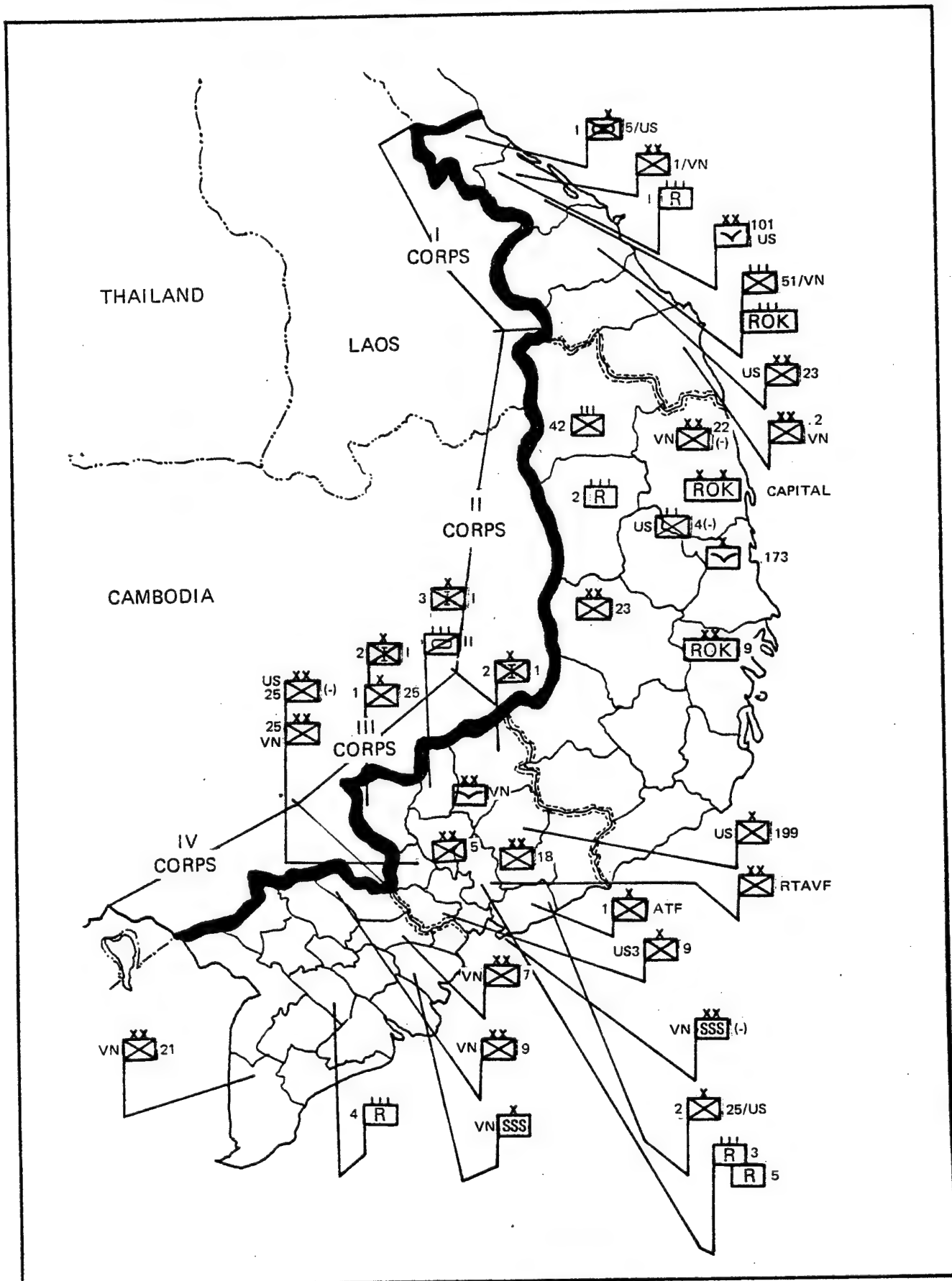
As the situation continued to improve, and in keeping with the new U.S. policy of turning over combat responsibilities to the RVNAF, U.S. troops gradually withdrew. During the short seven months that followed the Nixon announcement, a total of 115,000 U.S. troops had returned home. A few key areas of operation vacated by U.S. forces were taken over by ARVN units. The 22d ARVN Infantry Division and the 24th Special Tactical Zone replaced the U.S. 4th Infantry Division north of Pleiku and in Kontum Province. The 5th ARVN Infantry Division took over the areas of Dau Tieng and the "Iron Triangle" in Binh Duong Province from the U.S. 1st Infantry Division. At Dong Tam, in Dinh

Tuong Province, the U.S. 9th Infantry Division turned over its responsibility to the 7th ARVN Infantry Division. Finally, prior to the initiation of the Cambodian Incursion, the U.S. announced four additional increments totalling 150,000 troops would be redeployed before the end of April 1971. By the start of 1970 the situation had improved to the point where the RVNAF and U.S. Forces could increase their efforts on destroying enemy bases inside South Vietnam and pushing ahead the pacification and development program. (Map 1) Major RVNAF units conducted operations in coordination and cooperation with U.S. units in order to learn and exchange experience on tactics and techniques employed in large-scale combat operations.

In Military Region 1, the 1st ARVN Division, the U.S. 101st Airborne Division and the 1st Mechanized Brigade of the U.S. 5th Infantry Division operated in the DMZ area and west of Hue to destroy enemy regional forces; the units also supported pacification efforts in Hue and Quang Tri Provinces. South of the Hai Van Pass, the 2nd ARVN Division, the 51st Separate Regiment, the 23rd U.S. Infantry Division, and the 28th ROK Marine Brigade supported pacification efforts in Quang Tin and Quang Ngai Provinces, especially the area southwest of Da Nang.

In the Central Highlands, the U.S. 4th Infantry Division (-) cooperated with the ARVN 22d Infantry Division in launching attacks against enemy Base Area 226, northwest of Binh Dinh Province. A significant action was the clearing operation, by the ARVN 42d Regiment, around the Dak Sang CIDG Camp. This camp, with a garrison of one CIDG Battalion, was surrounded by the enemy 28th and 66th Regiments, reinforced by the 40th Artillery Regiment. During more than a month of operations, and supported by extensive U.S. air (B-52 and tactical) more than 1,000 casualties, were inflicted on the enemy. Also in the Military Region 2 area during early 1970, U.S. Field Force I initiated "Pair-Off" operations with the objective of improving the combat efficiency of the territorial forces. In these operations, a specific RF or PF unit would pair off to work with a specific U.S. or Republic of Korea unit.

Map 1 - Major RVN, U.S. and FWMAF Ground Units in Early 1970



In Military Region 3, during the Dong Tien campaign, several major U.S. and ARVN units operated together. The ARVN Airborne Division, for example, deployed alongside the U.S. 1st Air Cavalry Division in War Zone C north of Tay Ninh Province and in War Zone D north of Binh Duong Province. The ARVN 25th Infantry Division operated in conjunction with the U.S. 25th Infantry Division in the Ho Bo - Boi Loi area south of Tay Ninh Province. The ARVN 5th Infantry Division conducted combined operations with the U.S. 199th Infantry Brigade in the Long Khanh - Binh Tuy area. In the Rang Rang area, north of War Zone D, Special Forces elements discovered an important weapons cache. Approximately 1,000 assorted weapons were seized, and in excess of 200 tons of ammunition and supplies were destroyed.

In Military Region 4, the ARVN 7th Division operated along Highway 4 and in the My Tho area. The 9th ARVN Division assumed the responsibilities of the U.S. 9th Division in IV Corps and operated along the border in Kien Tuong and Kien Phong Provinces to prevent infiltration from Cambodia. In the U Minh area, the 21st ARVN Division heavily damaged the enemy 95A Regiment.

The operations cited above indicate that in early 1970, the RVNAF and U.S. forces clearly held the initiative throughout South Vietnam. This was especially true in the GVN Military Region 2, 3 and 4 areas where major enemy units had been driven back to the Cambodia border area.

#### *The Enemy Situation Prior to the Incursion*

The war in South Vietnam was waged by North Vietnam under the disguise of national liberation. Hanoi created the instrument for it in late 1960 by establishing the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam. This disguise was aimed at justifying the war before world opinion. North Vietnam claimed that this was an uprising of South Vietnam's people against the RVN regime, not an aggression from the north. But it was North Vietnam that in fact directed the war effort and supplied the manpower, material and financial resources for this effort through its local executive office, the Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN).

During the first few years of the insurgency in South Vietnam, the Viet Minh cadres and troops who had regrouped to North Vietnam in 1954 gradually reinfiltrated into the south to renew activities. These "regroupees" were organized into companies, then battalions, and eventually regiments in early 1965.

Enemy policies and strategy for the conduct of military activities in South Vietnam evolved from guerrilla warfare to general offensives, conducted during 1968 and early 1969. Because of the failure of the General Offensive -- General Uprising, the Hanoi High Command was forced to change its strategy to one of protracted warfare, rather than seeking an immediate military victory. There were several causes for this change in his conduct of the war.

Beginning in 1965, when U.S. and FWMAF arrived to participate in the war, Communist forces had constantly suffered setbacks in their campaigns. In particular, the 1968 General Offensive -- General Uprising had failed to produce the decisive great leap forward that our enemy had expected. The enemy increasingly lost his control over the population as a result of the GVN pacification achievements and clear-and-hold operational efforts made by U.S. and FWMA forces.

To redress his deteriorating posture, the enemy was forced to revise his military strategy. Resolution No. 9, issued by COSVN in July 1969, confirmed that North Vietnam had renounced its ambition for a quick total military victory and advocated instead a policy of winning "partial victories" during the period of U.S. troop withdrawal. At the same time, Hanoi was also pushing for the establishment of a coalition government in South Vietnam. As a result, our enemy placed greater emphasis on political activities. He endeavored to expand his "binh van" or proselyting actions among RVNAF troops and to develop hamlet and village revolutionary committee. In the area of military activities, the enemy adopted a more flexible strategy, concentrating his efforts on wearing down our forces by maximum use of sapper actions and shellings.

COSVN Resolution No. 9 also confirmed the enemy's continued policies of combining military initiatives with diplomatic offensive efforts, expediting the buildup of military and political forces, and



developing a strong, total, and sustained strategic offensive posture in all three strategic areas, namely: the cities; the countryside; and the mountains. His objectives were to: (1) defeat the pacification program and the clear-and-hold strategy; (2) defeat the RVN and U.S. plan to end the war in a position of strength, and to de-Americanize it; (3) continue attacks until the U.S. was forced to withdraw its troops completely, and until the RVNAF disintegrated. The enemy's ultimate goal thus amounted to no less than a decisive victory which, in his view, was predicated on two basic requirements: the complete withdrawal of U.S. troops and a superiority of forces, both political and military, over the RVN.

To implement these policies and strategic objectives, North Vietnam devised several plans of action aimed at the following:

1. Communist forces were to attack vigorously and deal U.S. units severe blows, causing them heavy losses and serious difficulties. This would prevent U.S. forces from carrying out their strategic mission of clear-and-hold, deny them the chance of gradually de-escalating the war from a position of strength, shatter their determination to fight, and finally force the U.S. to completely withdraw its troops.
2. Communist forces were to attack the RVNAF vigorously, destroy, neutralize or cause their major units to disintegrate, and to isolate them from their source of replacements so that they would be unable to accomplish their mission in the clear-and-hold strategy and take over combat responsibilities from U.S. forces. These attacks were to continue until the RVNAF finally collapsed.
3. Our enemy was to endeavor to build up his military and political forces, to make them increasingly larger and stronger and to regain his control over rural areas, important strategic grounds in mountainous areas and strategic communication lines, particularly those areas adjacent to cities and partly inside the cities themselves. Our enemy was also to expand people's organizations, instigate uprising in cities, increase food production to meet combat units' requirements, and continue to dismantle or weaken all levels of the GVN, particularly our pacification and development program, in order to complete the

establishment and consolidation of "People's Revolutionary" government at all levels, especially in villages and hamlets.

Early in 1970, as an incursion was being contemplated, Communist forces continued to consist of three components: combat, command and support, and guerrilla-infrastructure. Combat forces were made up of infantry, sapper, and reconnaissance units and supporting elements such as artillery, engineer, transportation, medical, and signal. There were three categories of combat forces: regular NVA units, southern main force, and local force units. Regular units were composed of soldiers of North Vietnamese origin, trained and organized in North Vietnam, and introduced into South Vietnam. South Vietnamese Communist units initially consisted of Southern regrouped but because of severe losses they were increasingly replenished with North Vietnamese replacements. As a result, they were practically considered as regular NVA units. NVA forces operating in South Vietnam were organized into divisions, regiments, and battalions or separate companies. Local forces consisted of units organic to provinces or districts which operated in well-defined areas, usually the places where Communist troops were born and grew up. These forces were organized into battalions or regiments during the 1969-1970 period.

Command and support elements comprised those personnel assigned to COSVN headquarters and regional commands, command cadre at province and district levels, and personnel of specialized agencies under COSVN.

Guerrilla forces were combat elements, usually of squad or platoon size, directly controlled by village and hamlet revolutionary committees. The role of guerrilla units was to carry out subversive activities such as harassment, terrorism, assassination, kidnapping, tax collection, propaganda, or to protect local revolutionary committees. They also served frequently as guides or reconnaissance patrols for main or local force units.

By the end of 1969, the total military strength of Communist forces in South Vietnam was estimated at 243,000 to include 133,000 combat troops, 58,000 command and support personnel, and 52,000 guerrillas. In addition there were estimated to be 84,000 political cadres of the Viet

Cong Infrastructure.<sup>2</sup> These forces were organized into 8 division headquarters, 57 regiments, 271 combat battalions and 58 combat support battalions. Communist units operating in South Vietnam were equipped with weapons made in Russia, Red China and other Communist countries. These included the AK-47 assault rifle, the RPD automatic rifle, the RPG grenade launcher, 12.7-mm and 14.5-mm machine guns and the B-40 and B-41 light antitank rocket launchers. After the 1968 general offensive, Communist forces used extensively 107-mm and 122-mm rockets. In addition, their units were also equipped with 75-mm, 82-mm, and 107-mm recoilless rifles and Chinese-made 60-mm, 82-mm and 120-mm mortars. In particular, sapper units were equipped with the K-6 pistol with collapsible stock which could be used as a submachine gun. In 1969, Communist units began to receive such modern signal equipment as the Russian TA-57 telephone set and R-105 radio set and the Chinese B-600 radio set.

In general, the situation throughout South Vietnam during the first quarter of 1970 was marked by a significant decline in enemy initiated activity.

In northern Military Region 1, most engagements by friendly units were made with enemy local force elements. Intelligence indicated some redeployments of NVA units in this area. For example, the 66th Regiment, NVA 304th Division was reported moving into the Ba Long area, northwest of Thua Thien Province; the 812th Regiment, NVA 324B Division reinfiltreated into southwest Quang Tri Province and the 29th Regiment of this division was reported moving from lower Laos into western Thua Thien Province, probably as reinforcement for enemy efforts in this area.

In the Central Highlands of Military Region 2, after the unsuccessful attack against the Dak Sang border camp in Kontum Province, the NVA 28th Infantry and 40th Artillery Regiments withdrew toward the Tri-Border area for refitting, rest and recuperation. The 66th Regiment,

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<sup>2</sup>RVNAF/U.S. Combined Campaign Plan AB 145, 1969.

NVA 2d Division of the B-3 Front was also reported falling back to south of Base Area 609 while the 24th Regiment remained inactive throughout the first quarter of 1970. In the coastal lowlands of Military Region 2, most enemy activities were aimed at disrupting pacification. During the month of January, the 22d Regiment, NVA 3d Division had moved from Quang Ngai into northern Binh Dinh Province.

In Military Region 3 and the areas around Saigon, enemy initiatives increased slightly as compared to the last quarter of 1969 but most of these activities consisted of sapper attacks and shellings against field command posts of friendly units operating north of Saigon. The enemy's elite unit in MR-3, the CT-9 Division, was reported moving from War Zone C in early April 1970 into a border area where its elements were deployed from the Dog's Head to the Angel's Wing area deep into Cambodian territory. Units of the CT-7 Division had redeployed farther east of war Zone C and to the north of Binh Long Province. It appeared that these units were avoiding contact with the U.S. 1st Air Cavalry Division and ARVN Airborne Division units operating in the Tay Ninh - Binh Long area; they were probably committed to the defense of border base areas. The NVA 5th Division, meanwhile, had withdrawn toward the Bo Duc and Bu Dop areas north of Binh Long Province. But one of its regiments, the 33d, was still reported in the Binh Tuy - Long Khanh areas. In the areas around Saigon, the enemy conducted two shellings against Saigon by 107-mm and 122-mm rockets during the first quarter of 1970, causing no damage to the city.

In the Mekong Delta enemy activities increased in March in the That Son (Seven Mountains) area of Chau Doc Province and in the U Minh Forests area of An Xuyen Province. A remarkable fact was the transformation of the 273d Regiment, NVA 9th Division, which formerly operated in MR-3, into the local D2 Regiment now operating in the U Minh area. This upsurge of enemy activity in the Mekong Delta resulted from military action by Cambodian troops in border areas after the political event in Phnom Penh on 18 March 1970. Faced with increased difficulties in these areas, the enemy was moving his supplies and materiel into the That Son area where rugged terrain afforded him good

concealment and protection. To provide security for these movements, the enemy had increased harassment activities to hold back friendly forces.

On top of these typical activities during the first quarter of 1970, enemy prisoners and ralliers disclosed that COSVN had been planning two offensive campaigns for 1970, in May and July respectively, with the objective of pressing the Paris peace talks toward an early settlement. However, the sudden change of government in Phnom Penh had forced our enemy to abandon these plans and turn his efforts toward Cambodia.

Beginning in April 1970, therefore, there was a flurry of enemy activity in Cambodia. This activity indicated that the enemy was hastily dispersing and concealing his supply storage points in the border base areas and displacing his most valuable materiel deeper inside Cambodia. At the same time, the enemy was endeavoring to control a corridor east of the Mekong River leading south in an apparent attempt to secure movements of supplies for his units in MR-3 and MR-4. Evidently, the closing of Sihanoukville by the new Khmer regime was beginning to have an adverse effect on the enemy supply system. Additionally, the enemy realized that the supplies already in Cambodia would be of even greater significance to his immediate combat plans.

The above events allowed our intelligence to predict the enemy's trend of activities during 1970 with reasonable accuracy. In all probability, enemy activities in South Vietnam would decline in Military Regions 3 and 4 and remain at approximately the same level in Military Region 2; most certainly, they would increase in the DMZ area.

#### *RVN-Cambodia Relations*

The Republic of Vietnam and Cambodia were neighbor countries who had had contacts with each other for a long time, despite a temporary break in diplomatic relations.

Phnom Penh, the capital of Cambodia was only a 40-minute flight from Saigon. Vietnamese of Khmer origin who lived in South Vietnam numbered about half a million, mostly concentrated in the Mekong Delta.

In Vinh Binh and Ba Xuyen Provinces, ethnic Khmer made up about 70% of the provincial population. Most of them were farmers; as citizens, they all received the same treatment as other Vietnamese from the GVN. Approximately 400,000 Vietnamese lived in Cambodia. In Phnom Penh, Vietnamese made up a large ethnic minority, second only to the Chinese but exceeding the Chams, the Thai, and the Laotians. In addition to Phnom Penh, most Vietnamese lived concentrated in the areas of Kampot, Svay Rieng, Kompong Chhnang, Kratie, Prey Veng, and Soeuk Dek where they made a living as professionals such as doctors and dentists, small businessmen, tailors, barbers, mechanics and handicraftmen. Many Vietnamese were civil servants in the Cambodian administration; they had gone there during the French colonial period when they were assigned to duties in the French administration and had chosen to stay. In the Tonle Sap area, several thousand Vietnamese earned a living as fishermen and farmers. In addition, there were about 5,000 Vietnamese working in large rubber plantations such as Chup, most of them of North Vietnamese origin.

During Sihanouk's regime, several conflicts occurred between Cambodia and the RVN. In 1954, a prominent Cambodian leader, Son Ngoc Thanh, took refuge in South Vietnam in protest against Sihanouk's policies. He organized an underground called the Khmer Serei (Free Khmer), composed of Khmer-origin Vietnamese who operated as guerrilla units along the RVN-Cambodia and Cambodia-Thai borders against Sihanouk. Sihanouk quickly denounced the RVN and U.S. for organizing and arming this rebellious force to subvert and overthrow his regime. To counter the Khmer Serei, Sihanouk organized his own party of Khmer-origin Vietnamese, called Khmer Kampuchea Krom (KKK). The KKK organization was particularly active in the provinces of Chau Doc and Kien Phong where many ethnic-Khmer had been living for several generations.

Under the Ngo Dinh Diem administration, Sihanouk manipulated the KKK organization into demanding the RVN return the provinces of Bac Lieu, Chuong Thien, Chau Doc, An Giang, An Xuyen, Ba Xuyen and Phong Dinh to Cambodia. In the eyes of the GVN, naturally, the KKK was just a rebellious group seeking to undermine South Vietnam's security at Sihanouk's

instigation. As a result of ARVN operations, the KKK later disintegrated; several of its members joined the U.S.-sponsored Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG). A few KKK survivors turned into bandits operating under a new name: the White Scarf Clan. During 1963-1964, they conducted frequent bus holdups and kidnappings for ransoms, mostly in Chau Doc and Kien Phong Provinces.

In 1960, after the abortive coup against President Diem, a few ARVN officers fled to Cambodia where they were given asylum. The Cambodian government not only ignored repeated requests by the GVN for their extradition but also failed to return the VNAF aircraft they had used for the flight.

The issue of national borders was another major cause of conflict between Cambodia and South Vietnam. Both countries seemed to ignore the delineation of national boundaries made by French authorities on French Indochina maps. In 1962, for example, Cambodian troops stealthily dug up border markers in Darlac Province and planted them deeper inside South Vietnam. In retaliation, Colonel Do Cao Tri, then the commander of the old 3d Military Region, ordered ARVN troops not only to restore these markers to their former positions but also rig them with mines to deter further violations. A few small islands west of Ha Tien that belonged to the Phu Quoc group, hence part of South Vietnamese territory, such as Hon Keo Ngua, Hon Kien and Hon Doi were invaded by Cambodian troops in 1962. Cambodia also demanded freedom of navigation on the Mekong River without having to pass through South Vietnamese customs control. The RVN national laws, however, did not permit such a preferred treatment. The issue of national boundaries and the regulations concerning Vietnamese living in Cambodia and Khmer living in South Vietnam were, therefore, constant sources of polemic and dispute between the two nations.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>A later dispute flared up in 1969 over continental-shelf rights when international oil companies signed contract agreements with the RVN for oil exploration in the Gulf of Siam, off the coast of South Vietnam.

In August 1963, Sihanouk severed diplomatic relations with South Vietnam. After Ngo Dinh Diem was overthrown in November 1963, Sihanouk proposed resumption of diplomatic relations with the RVN on three conditions: the RVN (1) respect Cambodia's territorial integrity and neutrality; (2) desist from supporting the Khmer Serei, and; (3) promise to protect the interests of ethnic-Khmer living in South Vietnam. Sihanouk also proposed the establishment of a neutralist alliance between Cambodia and the RVN. Accepting Sihanouk's proposals, the GVN sent a negotiating team headed by General Huynh Van Cao, then Director of Psywar and Civil Affairs, to Phnom Penh. General Cao's mission was to discuss outstanding issues of border conflict with the Cambodian government. Unfortunately, Cambodia unilaterally cancelled the on-going talks in March 1964 after a border incident in which VNAF aircraft bombed a Cambodian village by mistake during an operation north of Kien Tuong Province. Sihanouk's administration adamantly refused to resume negotiations despite the GVN's formal apology and promise to compensate for human and material losses.

In May 1964, the Cambodian government accused the RVN of invading its territory and filed a suit against the RVN with the United Nations General Assembly. This action deepened the conflict even more since Cambodia had elected to ignore the GVN's proposal to settle all border questions bilaterally. It had always been in the RVN's interests to solve the outstanding conflict with Cambodia in an amicable manner because if the conflict were solved, North Vietnam and the Viet Cong could no longer deny the existence of their illegal bases on Cambodian territory for attacks against South Vietnam.

The border conflict remained unsolved throughout the spring of 1964. In August 1964, Sihanouk openly declared he would sign border agreements with North Vietnam, the NLF and the Neo Lao Hak Sat. He also indicated he would negotiate with Red China for military assistance. This inimical attitude toward the RVN plunged the strained relations between the two countries into open and irreconcilable hostility.

Throughout all of the Sihanouk period, the Cambodian government frequently denounced the RVN for not recognizing its neutrality and



sovereignty and for mistreating ethnic-Khmer living in South Vietnam. The RVN reciprocated by denouncing the partial, pro-Communist neutrality of Cambodia. It also accused Cambodia of siding with Communist China and giving a hand to North Vietnam, allowing the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese troops to install logistic and rear service bases on Cambodian territory and from there to launch attacks against South Vietnam. But Sihanouk never admitted the presence of VC and NVA troops in Cambodia. He always claimed that hostile border activities were conducted either by armed bandits or contraband groups.

On top of these verbal assaults, Cambodia eventually resorted to hostile military action against the RVN. In March 1966, a U.S. Army Mohawk aircraft was seriously damaged by Cambodian anti-aircraft fire while on a routine reconnaissance flight along the northern boundary of Kien Tuong Province. The Mohawk had kept its course well within the RVN territory. Another hostile act occurred when the Cai Cai Special Forces Camp north of Kien Tuong Province received 12 rounds of British 25-pounder artillery from the other side of the border. Only Cambodian forces were equipped with this kind of artillery.

Relations between Cambodia and the RVN deteriorated even more when Sihanouk allowed the NLF to open a permanent office in Phnom Penh in June 1967. This office was upgraded to an embassy when the NLF transformed itself into the so-called Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam in September 1969. Cambodia was, indeed, the first country ever to recognize and establish diplomatic relations with a ghost government which was the antagonist of the GVN.

The ice between Cambodia and the RVN began to melt after Sihanouk was overthrown on 18 March 1970. The new Khmer regime adopted a harsh anti-Communist line, demanding that North Vietnam and the Viet Cong withdraw their troops from Cambodia. During March 1970, firefights pitted the Khmer forces against NVA and VC troops. In April 1970, the Khmer government appealed to the United Nations for action against increased infiltration of NVA and VC troops into Cambodia. By the beginning of April, NVA and VC troops had increased their activities in areas south of Phnom Penh, harassing the port of Kompong

Som (formerly Sihanoukville) and other provinces along the coast. In mid-April, the new Khmer government also appealed to free nations for assistance in protecting Cambodia's independence and territorial integrity. Then in late May 1970, diplomatic relations were resumed between the RVN and Cambodia.

The overthrow of Sihanouk came as a rare opportunity for the RVN and U.S. to dispose of their long concern about enemy activities on the other side of the border. In addition, the Khmer government continued to deny use of the Port of Sihanoukville to North Vietnam's supply ships.

## CHAPTER II

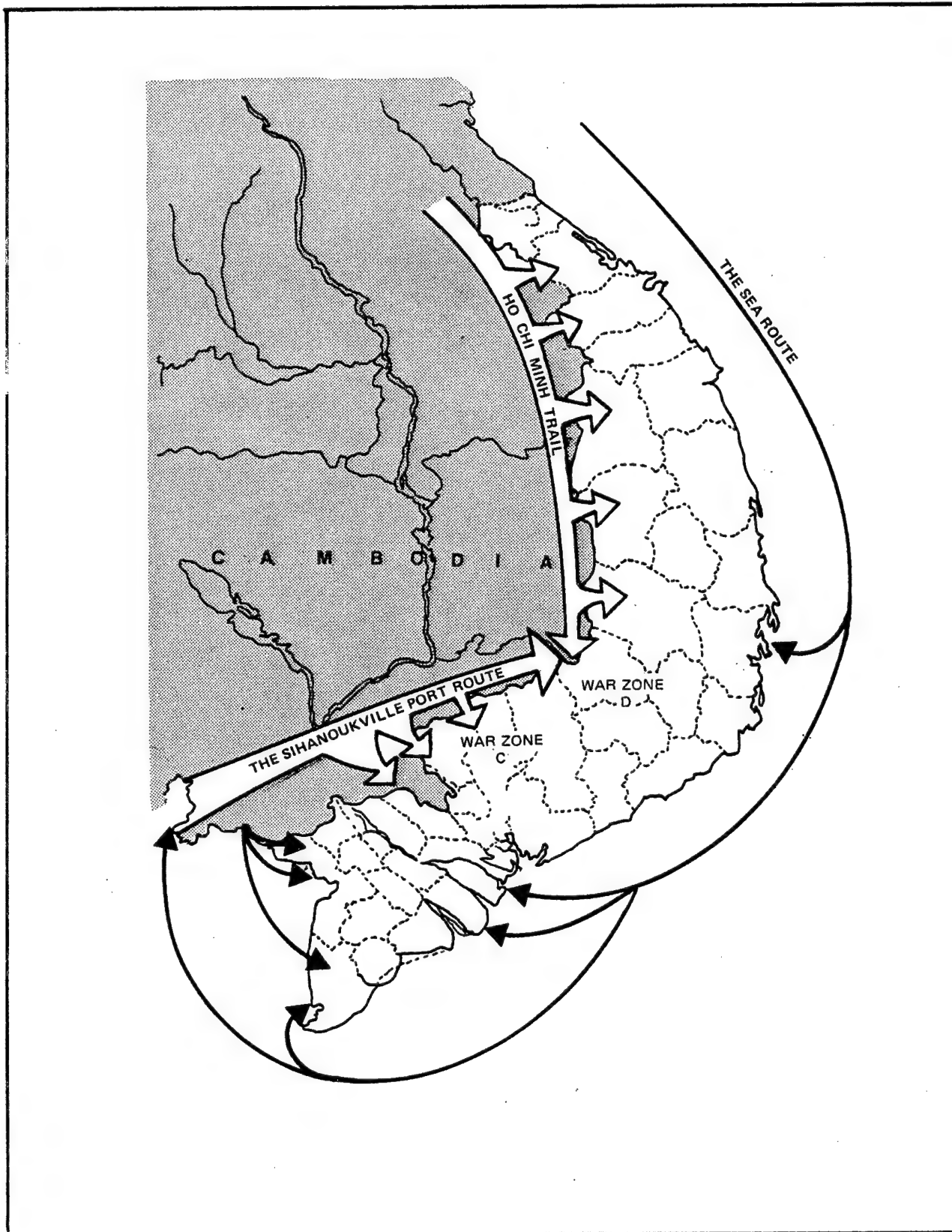
### The Enemy Use of Cambodian Territory and Organization for Logistic Support

To provide logistic support for enemy units operating in South Vietnam, North Vietnam established three major supply routes: (1) the Ho Chi Minh Trail; (2) the Sihanoukville Port Route; and (3) the Sea Infiltration Route. (*Map 2*) A system of bases was developed in conjunction with these routes where equipment and supplies were received, processed and stored prior to distribution to combat units inside South Vietnam.

#### *The Ho Chi Minh Trail*

The Ho Chi Minh Trail had existed in fact since the French-Viet Minh war. Then it was a system of jungle trails and mountain paths running along the Laos-Vietnam border, used by North Vietnam primarily to send mail and cadres to South Vietnam. It was trafficable only by bicycle, ox cart or elephant. In 1959, to expand its war of aggression in South Vietnam, North Vietnam activated the 559th Transportation Group, with a strength of approximately 50,000 troops and assisted by 100,000 laborers. This group was made up of several service branch units such as engineer, transportation, air defense, signal, and medical. Troops and laborers of the 559th Group widened existing trails, built new roads and connected them into an uninterrupted road system which ran from north of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) into Laotian territory then continued south through the Tri-border area and terminated in the eastern part of Cambodia adjacent to South Vietnam. To protect the Ho Chi Minh Trail against USAF bombings, North Vietnam installed an

Map 2 – NVA Main Infiltration Routes



extensive air defense system equipped with all calibers of antiaircraft weapons, from 37-mm to 100-mm guns.

The enemy's efforts to keep the Ho Chi Minh Trail open to infiltration traffic despite devastating, round-the-clock U.S. airstrikes were truly extraordinary. Aerial photos revealed that new detours and floating pontoons appeared only a few days later where roads and bridges had been destroyed beyond repair. To avoid detection by U.S. air reconnaissance, the enemy took great care in camouflaging his vehicles and dispersing his antiaircraft weapons. From the air, it was difficult to locate these well-concealed weapons unless they fired upon our aircraft. For the transportation of foodstuff, the load was distributed among individual laborers, each carrying in his back pack from 40 to 60 kilos. These laborers moved in stages from one station to another, usually separated by a day's march. In this way, they continued their long journey south each day, regardless of the vagaries of the weather until reaching the final station.

To facilitate the movement of supplies, weapons, and personnel into South Vietnam, the 559th Group developed a series of "binh trams" or stations along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Each station was a self-contained logistic base, responsible for a certain area. Its major components often included transportation, engineer, medical, maintenance and security units and a number of storage facilities. All movements of equipment and supplies originated in Vinh, North Vietnam, from where they branched out to various points of access to the trail system either on the Laotian border or in the DMZ area. The passes at Mu Gia, Ban Karai and Ban Raving were major points of entry into lower Laos. They were used mostly for the personnel and supplies enroute to South Vietnam. Eventually, our enemy perfected his transportation system and techniques to the point of reducing infiltration time by two thirds. Among the binh trams operated by the 559th Group, a few were cited periodically for meritorious achievements and earned the distinguished name of "Ten Thousand Tons". These stations had succeeded in moving more than ten thousand tons of merchandise during a selected period, despite adverse weather and U.S. bombings.

### *The Sihanoukville Port Route*

The other major logistic route besides the Ho Chi Minh Trail was through the port of Sihanoukville. It originated in the port of Sihanoukville, and led across lower Cambodia toward enemy base areas on the Cambodia-South Vietnam border. As far as the enemy was concerned, this port route was the safest and most secure because it lay entirely on Cambodian soil. By contrast with the Ho Chi Minh Trail, the Sihanoukville Port Route was not subjected to U.S. bombing.

North Vietnam and the Viet Cong had made overtures to Sihanouk as early as the rupture of relations between the RVN and Cambodia in 1963, aimed at securing the use of Cambodian territory. In February 1968, high ranking Viet Cong and North Vietnam officials went to Phnom Penh to negotiate the establishment of bases in Cambodia and the movement of supplies and equipment through Cambodia to these bases. In March 1968, Sihanouk himself announced that he had approved these requests because, as he said, Cambodia and North Vietnam and the Viet Cong were facing the same enemy: the imperialist American aggressors. Then, during an inspection trip to Takeo the same year, he openly declared that Cambodian authorities would voluntarily overlook trade activities by the Cambodian population to supply the Viet Cong with food and he would even authorize the use of Cambodian hospitals by VC and NVA wounded until they were fully recovered.

The port of Sihanoukville was a major point of entry for NVA supplies and materiel. It was estimated that the tonnages moving through Sihanoukville were sufficient to meet 100% of the requirements of enemy units in the RVN III and IV Corps areas, and perhaps two-thirds of the requirements for enemy units in the II Corps area of South Vietnam.

By contract arrangements with the Hak Ly trucking firm, communist supplies and equipment were unloaded from ships at the pier and transported by truck to Svay Rieng and Kompong Rau, two Cambodian towns located north of Kien Tuong Province. From these points, VC troops and laborers picked up the supplies and moved them to border base areas.

Intelligence reports subsequently confirmed that some Cambodian military vehicles and troops even assisted the Viet Cong in transporting weapons, ammunition and foodstuff toward base areas along the border. Cambodian troops and officials at outposts and checkpoints along the border were bribed by smuggler groups into letting contraband merchandise, such as rice and medicine, pass into Viet Cong base areas. Business was brisk and lucrative because the Viet Cong usually paid higher prices. These smuggling activities were conducted mostly by Chinese entrepreneurs residing in Cambodia.

### *The Sea Route*

In addition to the land route down to Ho Chi Minh Trail and the combination sea-land route through the Sihanoukville Port, North Vietnam also endeavored to deliver supplies by trawlers or smaller craft to the beaches of South Vietnam. (Map 2) Beginning in 1965, North Vietnam had equipped its SL-2, SL-3, SL-4 and SL-5 trawlers with weapons and radio equipment for use in infiltration runs. These were cargo vessels measuring from 25 to 40 meters in length and capable of hauling from 100 to 400 tons of merchandise. They all belonged to an infiltration flotilla under the control of the 500th Sea Transportation Group. Usually, these infiltration trawlers were loaded at Hai Phong (North Vietnam) or at ports on Hai Nan Island (Red China). From these ports, they sailed into international waters in the South China Sea and continued their journey south until reaching their destination points on South Vietnam's coastline. From 1965 to 1969, a total of 17 such boats were detected and sunk by U.S. Naval or VNN ships, particularly at Vung Ro in Phu Yen Province, and at river mouths of the Mekong Delta such as Binh Dai in Kien Hoa Province, Long Toan in Vinh Binh Province, and Bo De in An Xuyen Province. By 1969, Operation "MARKET TIME", a combined VNN and U.S. 7th Fleet effort, had practically eliminated this method of infiltrating supplies and equipment from North to South Vietnam.

### *The Base Area System*

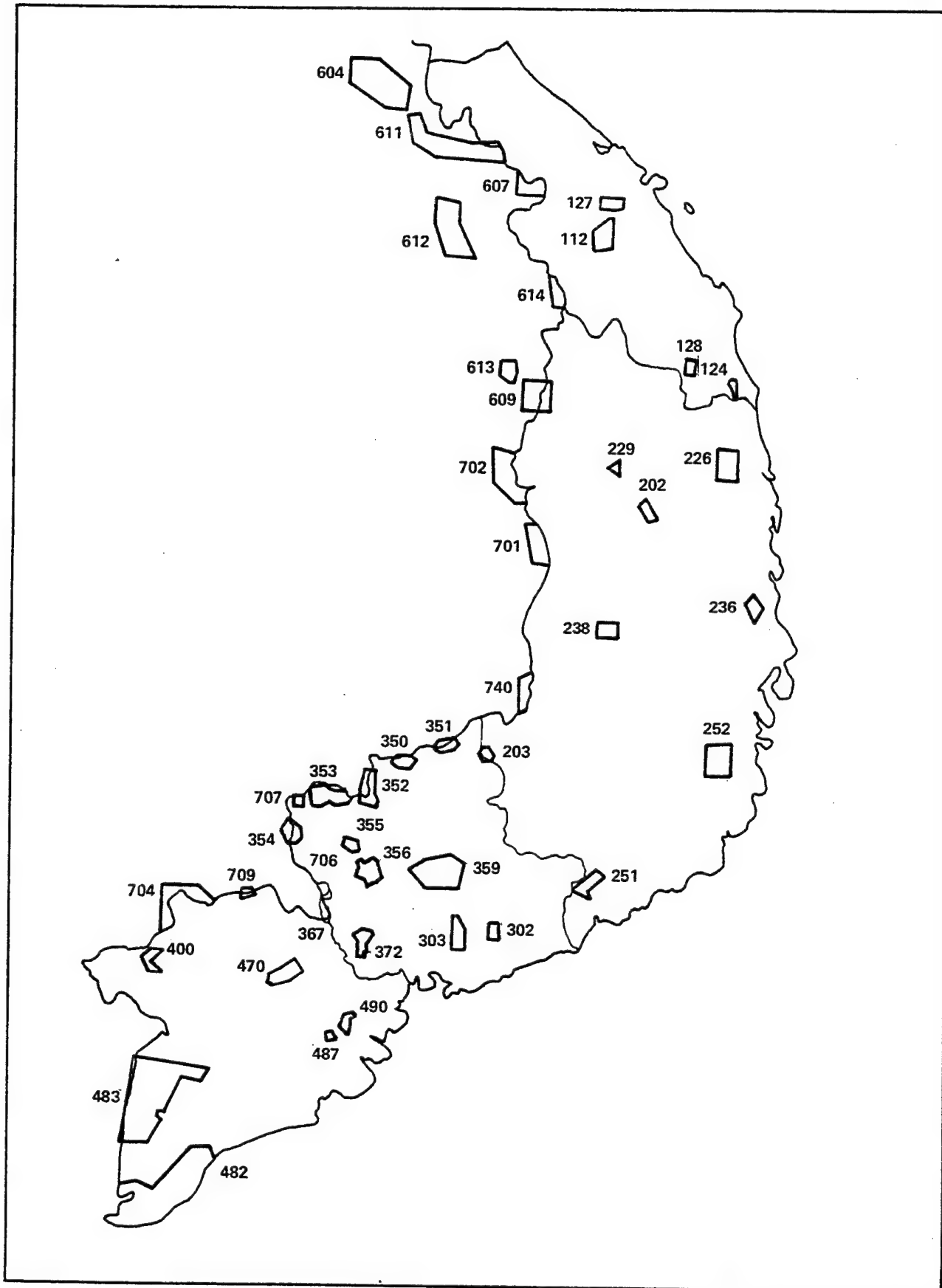
Because of the weakness of the Lao and the neutralist, pro-communist forces of Sihanouk, the VC/NVA were able to establish a series of some 20 bases along the borders between Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam, which permitted movement of all types of supplies for VC/NVA units in South Vietnam. (Map 3 & 4) So extensive and complete was this system that the border areas, particularly in Cambodia, became almost as useful to the VC/NVA effort as North Vietnam itself.

Base areas located to the west of I Corps were not in the objective area for the incursion. Therefore, discussion is limited to Base Area 609 and those located to the south of it, the majority of which were located on Cambodian territory.

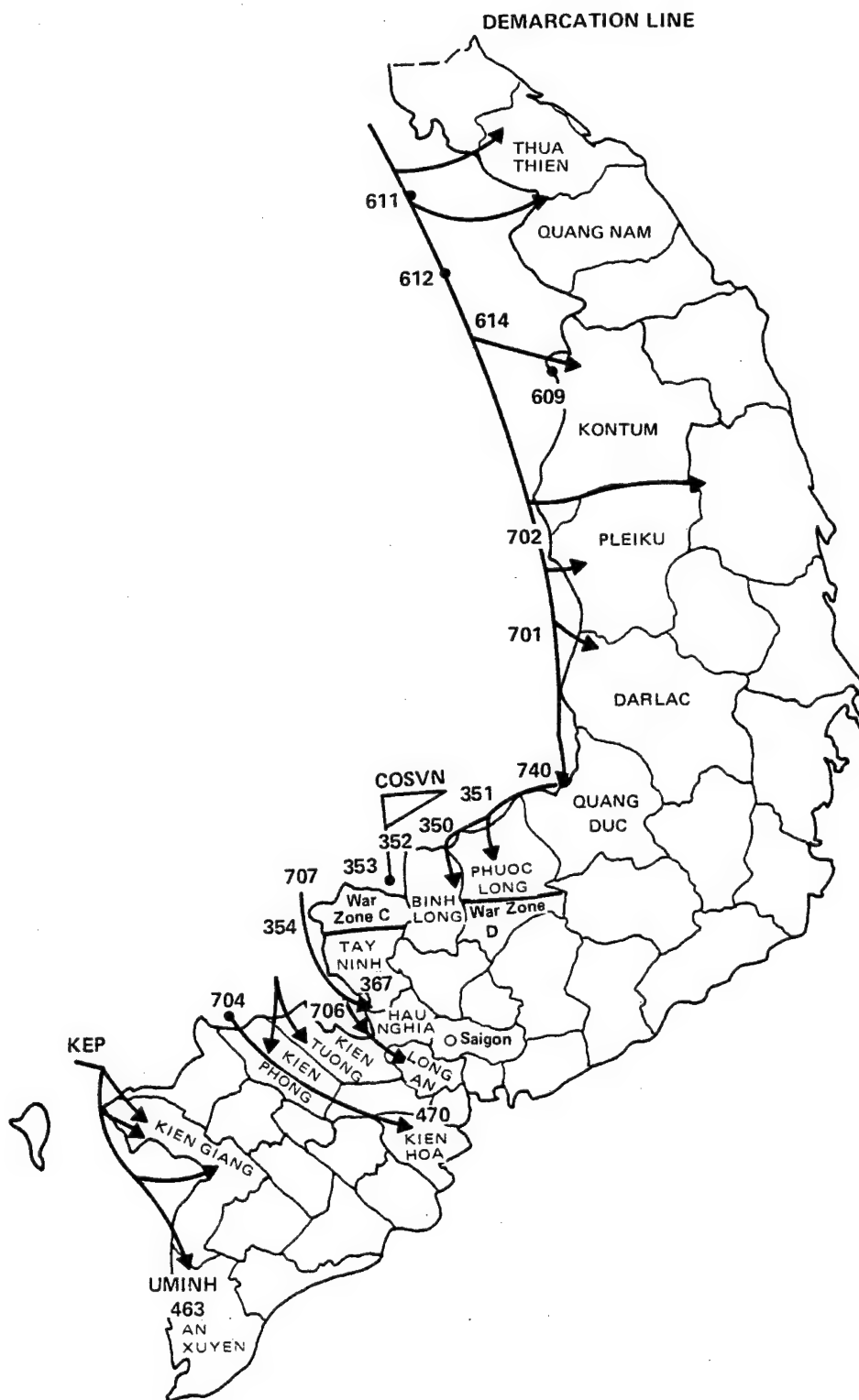
Base Area 609 was the most important of all the base areas. Located in the triborder area, it provided permanent locations for the headquarters of the B-3 Front and the 2nd NVA Division, and it was from here that enemy operations in the three provinces of Kontum, Pleiku, and Darlac were controlled. It was also developed as a general depot, where everything coming from the north was placed in stock, to be distributed later to units to the south of the II Corps area. The redistribution mission was the responsibility of transport unit 250. Because of the difficulty of the terrain in which it was located, the U.S./RVNAF forces elected not to attempt a ground assault on Base Area 609; it was subjected to air strikes only during the incursion. To the south, Base Area 702 was a rear base for all units operating in Pleiku and Kontum provinces. Base Area 701 or Chu Pong, as it was more commonly known, supplied units operating in Darlac Province and the southern portions of Pleiku Province. Base Area 740, known also by the name Nam Lyr, supported units in Darlac Province, and also served as a transit point for supplies moving to Base Area 252. Of interest is the fact that base areas 701, 702, and 740 received supplies from Cambodia (Stung Treng, Lomphat, Kratie) as well.



Map 3 - The Enemy Base Area System on 1 April 1970



Map 4 - Additional Infiltration Routes to Support the Base Area System



The most important base area in the III Corps zone was Base Area 354. Located to the west of Tay Ninh, its two NVA rear service groups, the 82nd and the 100th, moved supplies into War Zone C and to Base Area 367. Known also as Duong Minh Chau, Base Area 354 was the objective of U.S. OPERATION JUNCTION CITY in 1967, and COSVN headquarters was located there in the early days of the war. To the north were base areas 707, 353, 350, 351, and 352, where were found supply depots, headquarters for units and military regions, radio stations, training camps, rest areas, hospitals, POW camps, and ammunition dumps. They were all well constructed, often underground, with communications trenches, and well camouflaged. After U.S. and allied forces began to operate in large numbers in RVN, much information was received to indicate that enemy units abandoned their practice of locating headquarters permanently in one area, and began to move around in order to avoid allied bombing.

Base Area 351, also known as Bo Duc, was a corridor for moving supplies into southern III Corps area and into War Zone D; it was operated by rear transportation unit 86. Base Area 352, located in Fish Hook, was the supply base for all enemy units in the provinces of Tay Ninh, Binh Long, and Binh Duong, and was operated by rear transportation unit 70. Base Area 367, also known as Mo Vet Ba Thu, supported all enemy units in Hau Nghia and Long An Provinces; it was also the entry point for all personnel replacements for enemy units in III and IV Corps areas. Of base areas 704 and 709, the more important was 709 because it ensured the supply of enemy units in the three provinces of Kien Tuong, Kien Hoa, and Dinh Tuong. Base Area 704 was also known as Giong Bau, and is remembered as the site of a large battle involving the ARVN Airborne Brigade in 1964. General Cao Van Vien, then a colonel, commanded the airborne brigade, and was wounded in the battle.

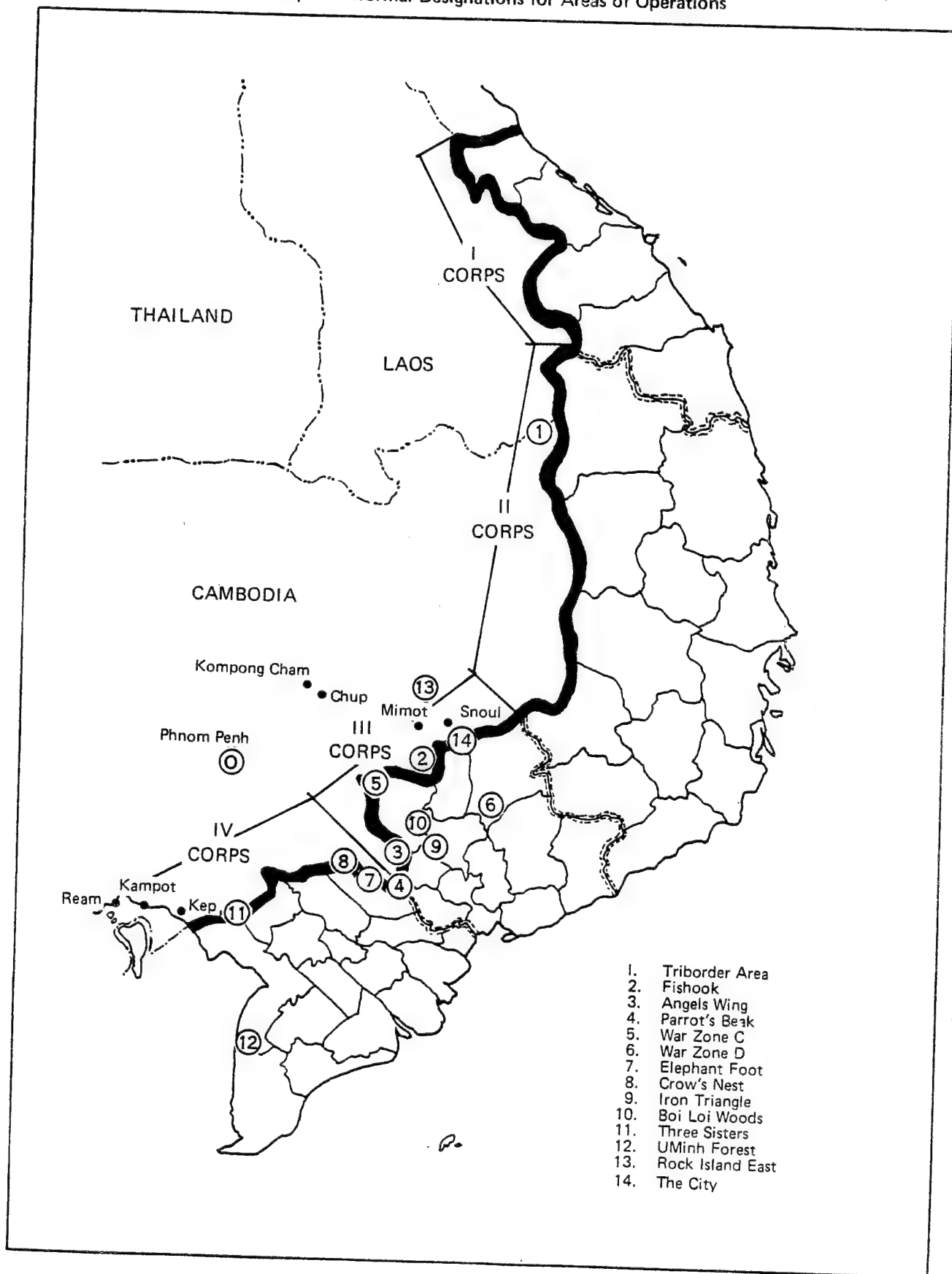
According to enemy prisoners and ralliers, most supplies intended for enemy units operating in the III Corps area came from Snoul and Mimot in Cambodia. Snoul received food from Kratie, Mimot, and from Kompong Cham. From these two transit points, laborers and VC troops moved supplies into South Vietnam through border base areas. The enemy made extensive use of motorized sampans and boats for the transportation of supplies out

of Base Area 354; they usually moved by night along the Vam Co River, and were heavily camouflaged to avoid detection. During OPERATION BIRMINGHAM in 1967, elements of the U.S. 1st Cavalry Division discovered many such sampans and boats and a loading ramp in the Lo Go area west of Tay Ninh.

There were five infiltration routes leading into the Mekong Delta, four of them by land. The first land route originated in the Parrot's Beak area and led toward a point on the common boundary of MR-3 and MR-4, then into Go Cong Province. The second route started from the Crow's Nest area, north of Kien Tuong Province, went through the Elephant's Foot, and entered Base Area 470. The third route, originating in Cambodian territory, went through a point on the common boundary of Kien Phong and Kien Tuong Provinces, then led toward the eastern part of Base Area 470. The fourth route followed the Mekong River from Cambodia and ran into Kien Hoa Province. A small boat infiltration route ran from the ports of Ream and Kep through the Three Sister's area (the coastal area south of Ha Tien) into the northwestern part of the U Minh Forest. From Kep, this route might also go to the western part of Phu Quoc Island and to the northwestern area of the U Minh Forest. (Map 5)

In early 1970, enemy resources for his conduct of the war in the south had to come primarily from North Vietnam. The movement of these men and this materiel, in the volume required, was made possible by the existence of the infiltration routes and base area system in Cambodia and by the active cooperation of the government in Cambodia. It is particularly significant that all of the bases supporting enemy operations in the III and IV Corps areas received their supplies through the Cambodian port of Sihanoukville (Kompong Som), to where they were delivered by ships from North Vietnam. If Sihanouk had been truly neutral, such extensive enemy use of Cambodian territory would not have been possible, and the major combat initiated by the enemy in RVN during 1970 would have been very difficult, if not impossible.

Map 5 - Informal Designations for Areas of Operations



### CHAPTER III

#### Planning the Combined Incursion and Early Cross-Border Operations

From the Vietnamese point of view, the Cambodian incursion was a series of operations commencing shortly after the change in government in Cambodia on 18 March 1970, and continuing after the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Cambodia on 30 June 1970.<sup>1</sup>

#### *Significant Events*

On 8 March 1970, several demonstrations took place in the Cambodian provinces along the border. The demonstrators demanded that North Vietnamese Army and auxiliary troops withdraw from Cambodia. Two days later, the same demonstrations resumed in earnest. In Phnom Penh, angry demonstrators marched to the North Vietnamese Embassy and smashed its windows with rocks.

Chief of State Sihanouk, meanwhile, was undergoing medical treatment and vacationing in France. The direction of governmental affairs was assumed by General Lon Nol and Deputy Prime Minister Sirik Matak.

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<sup>1</sup>The term "combined incursion" is used to designate those operations which took place during the period when U.S. forces were also authorized to operate in Cambodia -- 30 April to 30 June 1970. This chapter, will discuss the JGS view of the changed situation in Cambodia, the development of a concept for the combined incursion, planning for the combined incursion, and those cross-border operations conducted by ARVN forces, operating alone in Cambodia prior to 30 April 1970. The RVNAF and U.S. operations conducted during the combined incursion are discussed in Chapter IV.

On 12 March 1970, General Lon Nol sent an official message to Hanoi asking for the withdrawal of NVA and auxiliary forces within 72 hours; the deadline was set for 15 March. On 16 March, other demonstrations took place with the same demand that NVA/VC forces immediately vacate Cambodian territory. On 18 March 1970, the Cambodian National Assembly passed a resolution stripping Prince Sihanouk of all governmental powers. General Lon Nol took over as prime minister and Prince Sirik Matak continued to serve as deputy prime minister.

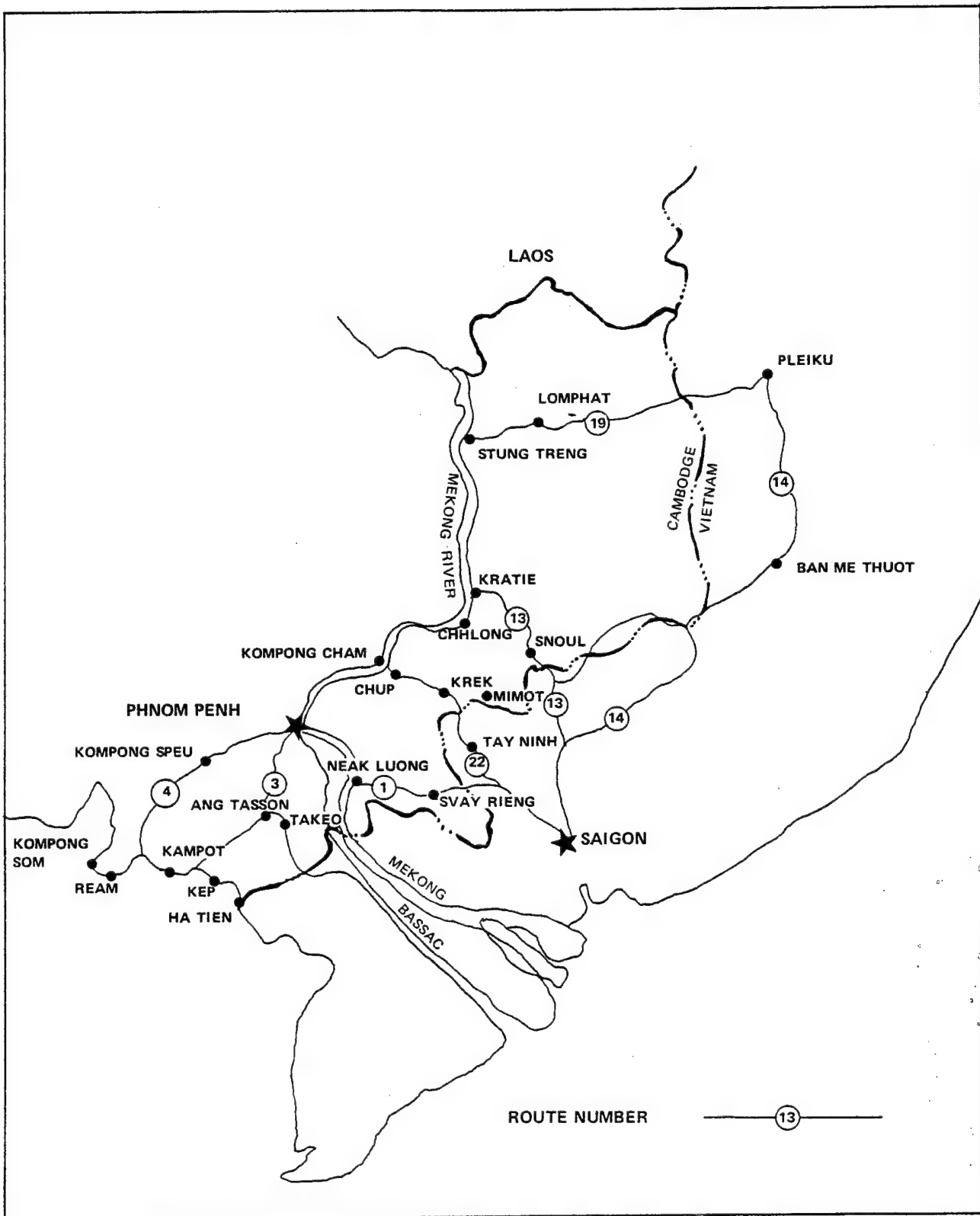
On 25 and 26 March, several demonstrations occurred in the provinces east of the Mekong River such as Svay Rieng and Kompong Cham, all crying support for the deposed Sihanouk. To disperse these mobs, the new Khmer government had to use its military forces. Reports suggested that North Vietnam was behind these demonstrations or even actively organized them. In any event, all staff members of the North Vietnamese embassy were found leaving Phnom Penh for Hanoi the next day by the aircraft of the International Control Commission (ICC).

Then, beginning in early April, NVA forces openly attacked Khmer outposts along the border and other towns east of the Mekong River. On 20 April, they overran Snoul, 16 km north of Binh Long Province. On 23 April, NVA troops attacked and seized Mimot after destroying an important bridge on Route 13 connecting Snoul with Kratie. On 24 April, they attacked the coastal city of Kep, north of Ha Tien, and on 26 April they opened fire on ships and boats sailing on the Mekong River. On the same day, they also took the town of Ang Tassom northwest of Takeo City and attacked Chhlong City northeast of Phnom Penh. (*Map 6*)

While NVA forces were conducting these attacks, Vietnamese residents in Cambodia were ordered by the new Khmer government to assemble into camps and denied freedom of movement. In Phnom Penh, a special curfew was imposed on Vietnamese residents from 6 pm to 6 am. The new Khmer government explained that these restrictive measures were necessary to prevent NVA troops from penetrating Vietnamese communities and carrying out terrorist actions against Khmer officials and troops.

On 15 April, the local population of Chau Doc and An Giang Provinces discovered many corpses floating on the Mekong River from the direction

Map 6 – Cambodia and RVN Border Region





of Phnom Penh upstream. According to their reports, nearly a thousand such bodies were sighted, all of them with arms tied in the back and exposing firearm wounds, some of them beheaded. Our people identified most of them as being Vietnamese. Next, the Saigon press, on 16 April, reported that approximately 100 Vietnamese residents were killed in the Takeo area. Later, the Khmer government explained that these were accidental deaths caused by firefights between Khmer and NVA troops. According to the foreign press, however, these Vietnamese residents were killed by Khmer troops while living in concentration camps.<sup>2</sup>

On 17 April, the U.S. discreetly sent over to Phnom Penh 6,000 AK-47 rifles which had been captured from the enemy by U.S. and RVN forces in South Vietnam. At the same time, approximately 3,000-4,000 CIDG troops of Khmer origin were transported to Phnom Penh by U.S. aircraft to assist the Khmer forces.

On 17 April 1970, the new Khmer regime officially announced to the world that North Vietnamese troops were invading Cambodia. By that time, three out of Cambodia's seventeen provinces had been occupied by NVA forces who were also exerting heavy pressure on five others. At the same time, Cambodia appealed to the United States and other nations of the Free World for help in resisting North Vietnam's aggression.

#### *RVN Appraisal of the Changed Situation in Cambodia*

The Cambodian appeal for help in resisting NVN aggression came indeed as a most welcomed opportunity for South Vietnam to redress an unjust situation in which it had been victimized by Sihanouk's prejudice. For years Sihanouk had closed his eyes to North Vietnam's freedom of action on Cambodian territory, allowing our enemy to establish supply

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<sup>2</sup> TIME, "Night of Death at Takeo" and "New Horror in Indochina", 27 April 1970.

bases and sanctuaries in order to pursue his war of aggression against South Vietnam. Every Vietnamese serviceman wondered then why we did not have the right of pursuit into Cambodia. But all this had changed. We were delighted when the new Khmer government asserted a hard-line policy against our enemy, demanding that he withdraw his troops from Cambodia. We welcomed the new Khmer government's appeal for help to which we would certainly respond because RVN had found in the new Khmer regime not only a friendly neighbor but also a comrade-in-arms who shared our cause and fought against the same enemy. Surely, the United States could not ignore this plea. As the leader of the Free World, the U.S. could not let Cambodia or any other free country fall into Communist hands. American credibility was at stake.

But the question was how the U.S. and the RVN would respond to Cambodia's appeal and what common action could be taken so as to avoid Communist accusations that we were expanding the war. Surely we could not remain idle and let North Vietnam have freedom of action in Cambodia. If we did not act Cambodia would rapidly collapse. The Khmer Armed Forces (Forces Armees Nationales Khmeres — FANK) were only 32,000 strong, made up mostly of infantry battalions which were not only rudimentarily equipped but also lacking in combat experience. For the past 17 years, these forces fought no war. Now they were facing an invading army which was numerically stronger, better equipped and thoroughly combat-experienced. It was the same army that had been fighting American and South Vietnamese forces for the past several years.

What would happen if North Vietnam succeeded in overthrowing the Lon Nol regime and installed a pro-Communist government or reinstated Sihanouk in its place? If this were the case, I am sure that it would have brought very great difficulty for South Vietnam. Then the 600-mile infiltration corridor which ran the length of South Vietnam's western border from the Tri-Border area to the Gulf of Siam would allow North Vietnamese troops and weapons free access into South Vietnam and Cambodia would be an effective staging area for continued and unimpeded attacks against our country. During the previous few years, NVA units in South Vietnam were able to quickly replenish their materiel losses because they had control over border supply base areas and free access to the port of Sihanoukville.

One possibility of helping the new Khmer regime fight the mounting NVA threat without direct participation was all-out military and financial assistance. Cambodia obviously needed to develop and improve its armed forces; but such a process would take a long time. In the immediate future, it was obvious that no amount of military assistance could help Cambodia reverse the situation to its advantage in a short time. Time was now vital for Cambodia but Cambodia did not have time. In a certain respect, the Cambodian situation in April 1970 was not unlike what South Vietnam had gone through in late 1964 and early 1965. The only difference was that South Vietnam had then the benefit of continued and increased U.S. military assistance to develop its combat capabilities and the time required for this development process all made possible by the direct participation of U.S. forces in the war.

Direct participation by U.S. forces was another possibility. But it was a most unlikely possibility because the Nixon doctrine, which was predicated on the Vietnam experience, certainly precluded any plans to turn Cambodia into another Vietnam. Moreover, growing anti-war feelings in the United States were pressing for an early termination of the war and the return home of all U.S. troops. This situation was hardly conducive to U.S. military involvement in Cambodia and definitely unfavorable for the new Khmer regime, which suddenly found itself overwhelmed by the nascent war.

Of these two possibilities, neither could become a realistic policy option, capable of helping the Cambodians redress their deteriorating situation. Still, the U.S. could not remain on the RVN side of the border and watch the free occupation of Cambodia by NVA forces. The only logical recourse, therefore, would be a limited intervention. Since the fighting in Cambodia was just an extension of the Vietnam war, U.S. and RVN forces were entirely justified in pursuing the enemy beyond the border and by the same action, they could destroy NVA materiel, installations and bases on Cambodia territory. Thus, the enemy's potential for war-making in both countries would be reduced. But this action could not be conducted by RVN or U.S. forces alone, for obvious reasons. It should be a combined effort to take better

advantage of ARVN numerical strength and U.S. firepower. Besides, a combined action in which U.S. forces took the lead was entirely consistent with the current policy of developing the RVNAF combat capabilities.

In the final analysis, this was perhaps the only course of action capable of not only further improving security in South Vietnam and enhancing the chances of Vietnamization success, but also conceivably bringing about early peace. For the key to security had always been the enemy's safe havens along the border, and if Vietnamization were to succeed after U.S. forces had been withdrawn, then it was mandatory that this permanent threat from the border be removed once and for all. Furthermore, the destruction of these border bases might induce our enemy to negotiate seriously, hence improving the chances of early peace settlement. For the past year or so, peace negotiations in Paris had not made any significant progress. Our enemy continued to take advantage of this free forum for propaganda purposes. He persistently asked for a complete U.S. pull-out and the removal of the RVN regime. A successful action in Cambodia by our forces perhaps would improve the RVN negotiating position in Paris.

As far as the U.S. was concerned, failure to destroy enemy bases in Cambodia when the chance presented itself might even jeopardize the troop withdrawal schedule. An additional 150,000 troops had been scheduled for return home by April 1971. For this withdrawal to proceed smoothly, as scheduled, it was necessary to keep U.S. casualties and American emotions down. To achieve this, the best way would be to strike directly at the enemy's present and future capability for causing U.S. casualties. For by next year's April deadlines, what remained of U.S. forces in South Vietnam would be just enough to protect U.S. bases and installations. If the enemy's capability for warmaking was not destroyed now, then he would enjoy unlimited opportunities for causing U.S. casualties by next year, without fear of U.S. retaliation.

## *Concept for the Combined Incursion*

The destruction of enemy logistic installations in Cambodia had in fact been considered by U.S. and RVN military strategists for a long time. It was a military action that should have been carried out before 1970. Political dictates, however, had prevented such an action, as long as Sihanouk was still in power.

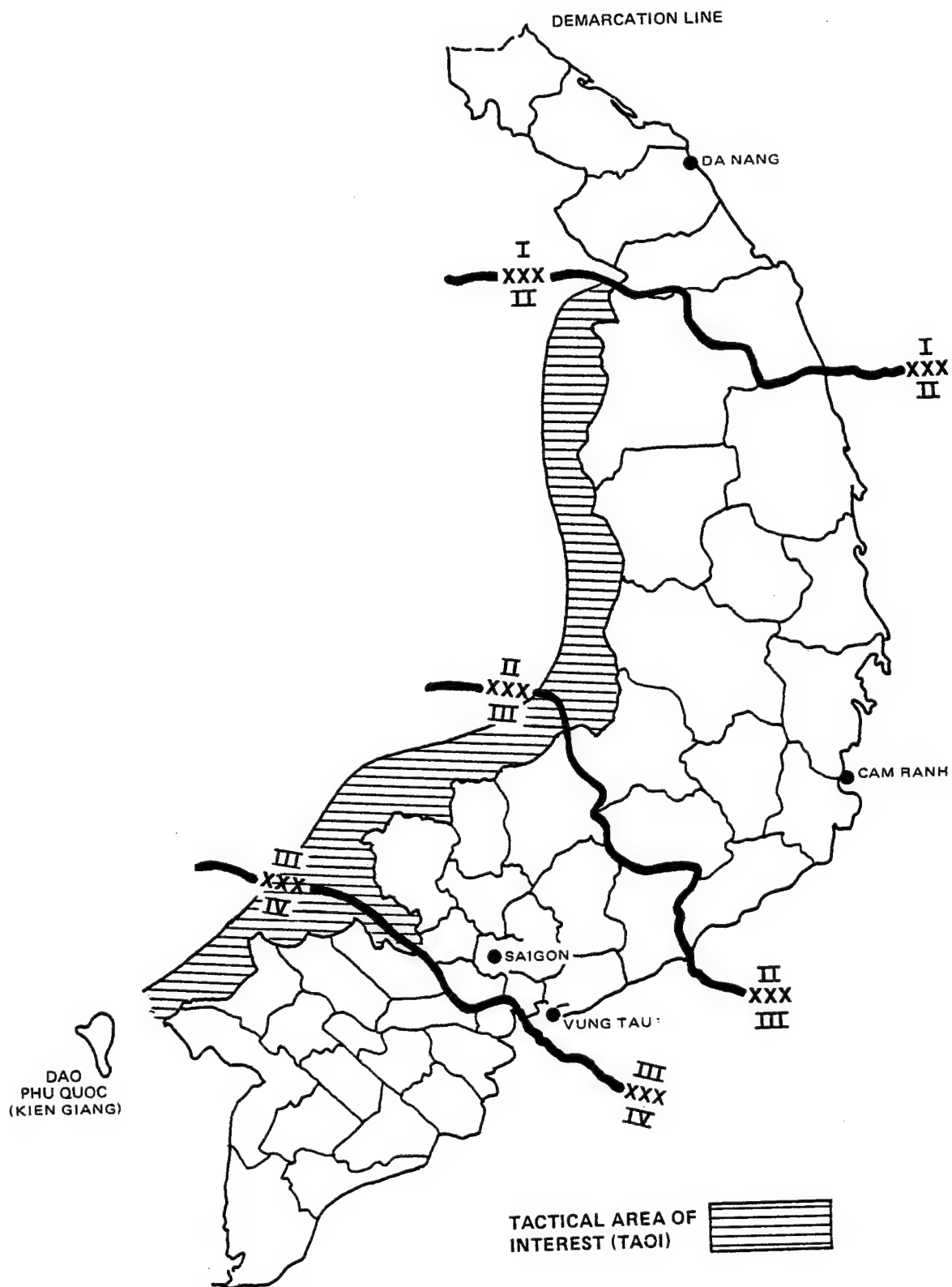
In mid-April 1970, General Abrams, COMUSMACV, brought up and discussed the subject of attacking NVA bases in Cambodia with General Cao Van Vien, Chief of the JGS, RVNAF. Immediately after, General Vien reported the subject of his discussions to President Nguyen Van Thieu. The Cambodian incursion remained a top secret, known only to the MACV commander and the Chief, JGS during their private discussions. No staff divisions of the JGS received any directive for planning. A few days after General Vien reported to President Thieu, the JGS received verbal orders from President Thieu that III Corps was to coordinate with the U.S. II Field Force for the conduct of operations against NVA base areas in Cambodia. These verbal orders were then transmitted to Lieutenant General Do Cao Tri, III Corps Commander, without modification by the JGS. Up to this point, the JGS had neither made formal plans nor issued any formal directives to Corps Commanders concerning operations in Cambodia.

In late April 1970, President Thieu sent a Secret directive to the JGS authorizing the RVNAF to conduct operations in Cambodia. This directive was then disseminated by the JGS to ARVN Corps Commanders. A copy of this directive was also sent by the JGS to MACV for information.

In general, the following rules were to be observed during cross-border operations:

1. The RVNAF area of operation was determined to be a zone, running the length of the RVN-Cambodia border with a depth varying from 40 to 60 km inside Cambodia. (*Map 7*) This zone was called the tactical area of interest (TAOI). Within this TAOI, ARVN Corps Commanders were authorized, to the extent of their capabilities, to conduct offensive operations against NVA bases, installations and storage points or in

Map 7 – RVNAF Tactical Area of Interest (Zone) for Operations in Cambodia



coordination and cooperation with U.S. forces which might be conducting operations in the zone. ARVN Corps Commanders were also authorized to cooperate and coordinate with Cambodian military region commanders for the conduct of unilateral or combined RVN-Khmer operations. For activities beyond their tactical areas of responsibility, ARVN Corps Commanders were required to obtain clearance from the JGS. For operations involving two or more ARVN Corps, the Corps Commanders were to coordinate with one another and submit operational plans to the JGS for approval.

2. During combat operations on Cambodian territory, the RVNAF were authorized to use Cambodian airfields, ports, as well as all waterway and land communication axes for the accomplishment of their mission.

3. The Vietnamese Navy (VNN) was to conduct patrols in the Gulf of Siam and be responsible for coastal defense from South Vietnam's national waters. In addition, it was to conduct activities on the Mekong River in coordination with and support of the Khmer Navy; the VNN was also to provide support for river convoys supplying Phnom Penh, from the border as far north as Neak Luong. Support responsibility from Neak Luong to Phnom Penh rested with the Khmer Navy.

4. The Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) was to provide support for combat operations as directed by the JGS, particularly air support for ARVN corps during cross-border operations.

5. The Commander of III Corps and MR-3 was responsible for providing support for road-clearing operations on route QL-1 from Go Dau Ha (RVN border) and for truck convoys as far as Neak Luong. From Neak Luong northward, the FANK would take over.

6. Weapons and ammunition captured from NVA forces by operational units would be turned over to the FANK as gifts to equip their own units. Those items of equipment that were too bulky to move back to South Vietnam could be destroyed on the spot but photo records should be kept.

7. While operating in Cambodia, RVNAF units were instructed to be always on guard. Special emphasis was placed on protecting the lives and properties of the Cambodian population, to include pagodas, temples,

holy places of worship and historical relics. The use of airstrikes was to be subjected to careful consideration. Aircraft were to be always guided onto targets by forward air controllers. In addition, the JGS would hold ARVN field commanders responsible for any act of mischief committed by troops under their control.

The above-mentioned regulations and zone of activity applied only to units of the RVNAF. The free use of this zone by the RVNAF had been agreed upon by the Cambodian government and the FANK General Staff during meetings between Vice President Ky and the new Khmer authorities when he visited Phnom Penh in April and early May 1970.

The zone of activity for U.S. forces extended no further than 30 km inside Cambodia. It is not known who decided this, but it could have reflected a desire on the part of President Nixon to be able to show that the U.S. incursion would be of a limited nature. Most of the enemy bases were located within this 30 km deep zone. After driving away enemy units from these bases and after destroying NVA supply storages in this zone, U.S. forces were to withdraw. 2400 hours, 30 June 1970 was the time by which U.S. forces were to be out of Cambodia.

On 30 June 1970, President Nixon declared that the only remaining American activity in Cambodia after July 1st would be air missions to interdict the movement of enemy troops and materiel where necessary to protect the lives and security of U.S. forces in South Vietnam.<sup>3</sup>

### *Planning*

Two important enemy logistic areas that especially interested the JGS and MACV were the Fishhook and the area west of Saigon (Angel's Wing - Parrot's Beak). The Fishhook, about 50 miles from Saigon, was an area teeming with enemy bases and supply points, and COSVN, the enemy headquarters which directed war efforts in the lower half of RVN. The other area, located just west of Saigon and the provinces of

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<sup>3</sup>Nixon, Richard M., "Report by the President on the Cambodian Operation" 30 June 1970. Quoted in U.S. News and World Report for July 13, 1970.



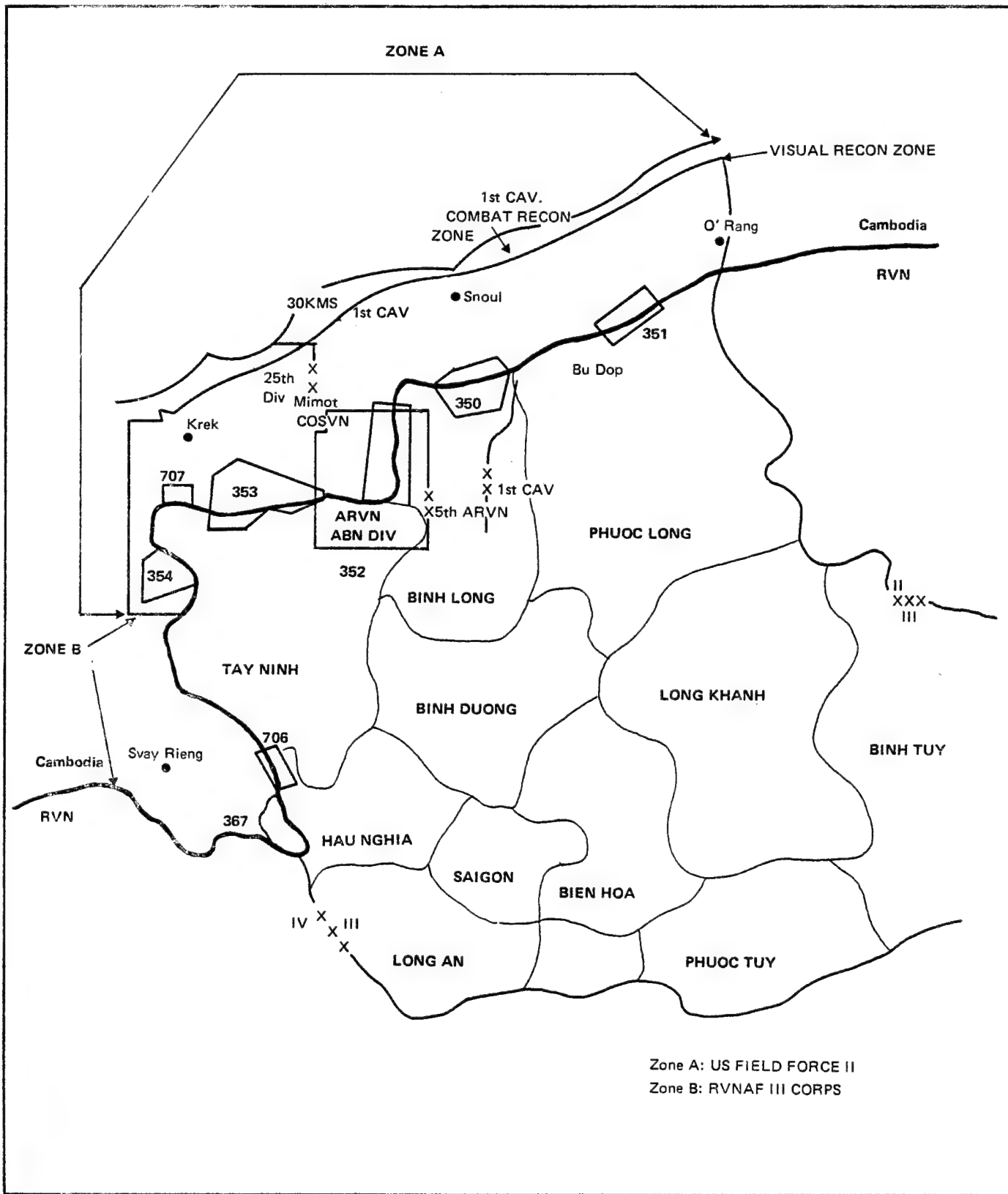
Long An and Hau Nghia, provided the enemy not only with bases and sanctuaries but also the shortest avenue of approach to Saigon. It was from this base area that the entire NVA 9th Division had penetrated into the western suburbs of Saigon during the 1968 Tet Offensive. Our intelligence indicated that several enemy troop cantonments, training centers and prisoner camps were located in this area.

It was the estimate of the JGS and MACV, supported by the commanders in the field, that to clean out these two areas would probably require an operational effort of from two to four weeks, depending on the situation. The two staffs also agreed that U.S. combat-experienced units such as the 1st Cavalry Division, the 25th Infantry Division, the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment and similar ARVN units such as the Airborne Division, armor and Ranger units, and infantry divisions under the control of III Corps would be appropriate for the effort.

May and June were two months of particularly good weather which definitely favored all ground operations. Beyond June, however, the weather was apt to impede operations to a certain extent. Lt. General Do Cao Tri, III Corps Commander, and Lt. General Michael S. Davison, II Field Force Commander, after discussions finally agreed to select an area of operation which was defined by a 30 km-deep zone from the boundary of MR-4/MR-3 to the boundary of MR-3/MR-2, enveloping the areas of Parrot's Beak and Angel's Wing. It was also agreed that the RVNAF would operate in the western portion of the combined area of operation because the terrain of this area was relatively flat and uncovered, in close proximity to axes of communication, and was an area where RVNAF forces were already familiar. During a later stage, the RVNAF area of operation was expanded westward to the Mekong River and northward to Kompong Cham. The other portion of the area of operations which ran from the Dog's Face area eastward to the MR-3/MR-2 boundary was the responsibility of U.S. Field Force II. The terrain in this area was rugged, consisting mostly of mountains and jungle. (Map 8)

After the tactical areas of responsibility for RVNAF and U.S. forces had been determined by the two field commanders, both staffs began to study and prepare plans. Planning activities were kept strictly confidential and involved only a limited number of staff officers. On

Map 8 - RVNAF III Corps and U.S. Field Force II Zones of Operations



the RVNAF side, the planning staff was headed by Colonel Minh, Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, III Corps and included the III Corps G-2, G-3, G-4, G-6, Engineer and Artillery Commanders. Other special staff officers were also consulted, as required, during the planning process. For those areas where U.S. assistance was needed, the III Corps planning staff consulted Brigadier General McAuliffe, Deputy Senior Adviser, III Corps.

Plans were completed on 27 April 1970. A special meeting was convened at III Corps Headquarters in Bien Hoa for the distribution of tasks. The main objective of this operation was Base Areas 706 and 367, which were located in the province of Svay Rieng in Cambodia and west of Hau Nghia Province. III Corps forces available for operations in Cambodia at that time consisted of 4 armored cavalry squadrons (M-41 + M-113), 2 ranger groups (of 3 battalions each), and the 46th Infantry Regiment, 25th Division. These units were organized into 3 infantry-armor task forces, designated Task Forces 325, 318 and 333.<sup>4</sup> Designated as TOAN THANG 42, the operation plan was to be implemented in two phases. In Phase 1, beginning on 29 April 1970, III Corps forces were to attack the Angel's Wing area. For Phase 2, whose date was yet to be determined, III Corps units were to be joined by IV Corps forces.

While III Corps was nearly completing its operation plans, the U.S. Field Force II received, on 24 April 1970, a directive from MACV directing it to conduct operations into the Fishhook area within 72 hours. Enemy base areas that the U.S. Field Force II had selected as objectives were Base areas 350 and 351 north of Loc Ninh and Bu Dop, base areas 352 and 353 in the Fishhook area, Base Area 354, west of Trai Bi in Tay Ninh Province, and Base Area 707, north of Thien Ngon. All these base

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<sup>4</sup> A Task Force was equivalent to a regiment and consisted of: 1 armored cavalry squadron and 2 or 3 infantry or ranger battalions. In terms of vehicles, an ARVN armored cavalry squadron was equivalent to a U.S. armor battalion.

areas were mountain and jungle redoubts, sheltering many important enemy logistic installations, in addition to COSVN headquarters.

Initially conceived plans envisaged only attacks against enemy base areas located in the immediate vicinity of northern MR-3 provinces. However, after the operation had been in progress for some time and especially after substantial results had been achieved, II Corps and the U.S. Field Force I received orders on 2 May 1970 to plan for attacks against enemy base areas located along MR-2's western border such as 609, 710, 702 and 740. These were important base areas which lay in the provinces of Kratie and Stung Treng, in the northeast of Cambodia and adjacent to the RVN border. It was from these base areas that NVA forces under the B-3 Front, such as the NT-2 Division and the 40th Artillery Regiment, had launched attacks against ARVN units and border camps of MR-2 during the past few years. The planning by II Corps and Field Force I terminated on 5 May 1970 and cross-border operations were actually initiated as of 6 May 1970.

As to IV Corps, it also received an order directly from President Thieu to make plans for the repatriation of Vietnamese residents in Cambodia, in addition to conducting operations in the Parrot's Beak, as directed by the JGS. Vietnamese residents in Phnom Penh had not only been ordered to live in camps under the control of Cambodian authorities; they were also brutally mistreated and lacked the basic amenities of daily living. In mid-April 1970, the GVN had sent a delegation to Phnom Penh to discuss with Cambodian authorities the repatriation of Vietnamese residents in Phnom Penh.

#### *Cross-Border Operations Prior to 30 April 1970*

After the change in government in Cambodia on 18 March and prior to 30 April 1970, the RVNAF conducted several limited raids into Cambodia. In addition, there were instances of RVNAF-Khmer military cooperation for purposes of fire support. Some of the activities were initiated by local Vietnamese commanders. However, the two most

significant of these raids were conducted in response to verbal orders given by President Thieu directly to Corps Commanders. These two raids were designated TOAN THANG 41 which was conducted by III Corps and CUU LONG/SD9/06 which was the responsibility of IV Corps.

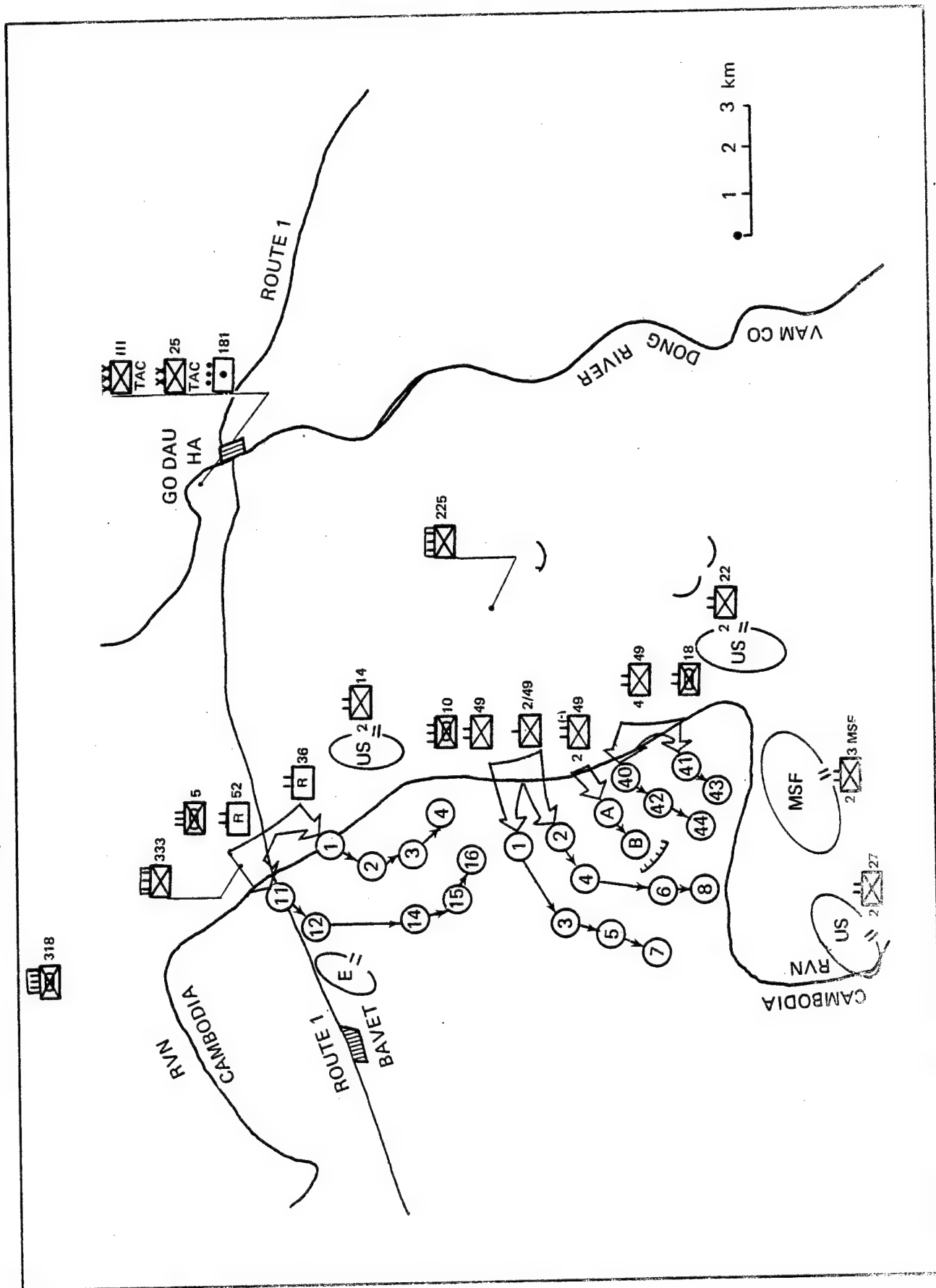
#### TOAN THANG 41

On 14 April 1970, III Corps units launched a three-day operation into the Angel's Wing area of Svay Rieng Province, called TOAN THANG 41. (Map 9) This was a flat, sparsely populated area with few trafficable roads. According to intelligence reports, this area contained many enemy troop cantonments, dispensaries and units such as the 267th and 269th Battalions of Subregions 2 and 6, the N-10 Battalion and the 100th Rear Service Unit. Most enemy facilities and installations were concentrated in the areas of Bo Ba Tay, Bo Hut and Dia Giai.

After the new Khmer government demanded the withdrawal of NVA and VC forces from Cambodia, in the aftermath of Sihanouk's departure, the RVNAF saw an opportunity to strike into this base area. Once directives had been given to initiate operations against all enemy base areas in Cambodia, the RVNAF increased its collection efforts on enemy activities. According to the enemy's own estimates, the change of government in Cambodia would result in actions by the RVNAF against his bases. Therefore, the enemy had taken precautions to move some of his supplies deeper inside Cambodia. Most noticeable was the fact that the 271st Regiment, NVA 9th Division had moved to the Bo Ba Tay area. In addition, COSVN had also issued emergency orders to its subordinate units, telling them to be prepared to react strongly against any RVNAF or Khmer unit found near the base area.

Plans for the operation into the Angel's Wing area to destroy enemy bases were developed and implemented by III Corps Headquarters in coordination with the U.S. Field Force II and the Senior Adviser, III Corps. Because U.S. forces were not authorized to operate in Cambodia during that period, no U.S. adviser would be accompanying ARVN units when they crossed the border; but as soon as ARVN units returned to Vietnam they would be rejoined by their advisers. For this operation

Map 9 - Area of Operations for TOAN THANG 41



in particular, III Corps had requested U.S. forces to form a screen on the RVN side of the border in the area southwest of the Vam Co East River. This request was approved and the 3d Brigade, U.S. 25th Infantry Division was designated to perform this screening mission. To monitor and better coordinate activities, each battalion of the U.S. 3d Brigade was assigned an ARVN liaison team. In the meantime, ARVN battalion advisers were to remain at tactical command posts of ARVN task forces on the RVN side of the border in order to monitor and update ARVN activities on the other side. Their mission was to file timely and accurate reports on their units with III Corps Forward and Field Force II Forward at Go Dau Ha.

To deceive the enemy, III Corps ordered Task Force 225 to conduct operations on 13 April in an area southwest of Go Dau Ha inside South Vietnam. The main ARVN operational forces, Task Forces 333 and 318 were deployed to northwest and south of Hieu Thien district town, also on the RVN side of the border.

At 0800 hours on 14 April 1970, the two ARVN infantry-armor task forces (minus their advisers) crossed their lines of departure. As soon as the border was crossed, the forward element of Task Force 318 was contacted by an enemy squad while Task Force 225 was heavily engaged by an enemy unit of unknown size. Artillery and tactical air provided support for our forces during the fighting. After the enemy had broken contact, friendly forces found 182 enemy bodies and captured 30 prisoners. Our losses were 7 killed and 43 wounded. The ARVN task forces bivouaced for the night at the sites of the day's fighting.

The next morning at 0800 hours, both ARVN task forces moved on while Task Force 318, kept in reserve, advanced along Route No. 1 to provide support for outposts along the border. During the day, both task forces made significant contacts with the enemy. In particular, Task Force 225 engaged the enemy heavily at a point 8 km west of the border. In this area, our 36th Ranger Battalion discovered a 200-bed hospital complex and two large caches of rice, totalling 139 tons. The 5th Armored Cavalry Squadron and the 52d Ranger Battalion found a cache containing 60 tons of rice and 3 tons of military clothing. All

the rice and military clothing were transported back to South Vietnam during the afternoon and the next day. During the night, ARVN forces remained in the area south of Route No. 1 and approximately 8 km west of the RVN border. Results for the day were 175 enemy killed and 5 captured. Our forces suffered 1 killed and 19 wounded.

On 16 April 1970, Task Force 318 was given responsibility for the movement of captured rice toward South Vietnam. Meanwhile, Task Force 333 patrolled its area of operation and Task Force 225 extended its activities southwestward. By 1600 hours, TF 225 had completed the search of its assigned objectives and began withdrawing from Cambodia. The 2/49 and 4/49 Battalions took the lead, followed by the 10th Armored Cavalry Squadron and the 3/40 Battalion, all moving back inside South Vietnam prior to darkness. However, Task Forces 318 and 333 remained on the other side of the border during the night and only withdrew the next morning. Both units reached the border at 1210 hours on 17 April 1970.

During three days of operation in the Angel's Wing area, friendly forces had inflicted heavy losses on the enemy. In total, 415 enemy had been killed or captured; over 100 assorted weapons and 200 tons of rice had been seized. Losses on the friendly side were insignificant; only 8 were killed, 67 wounded and 1 A-1H shot down.

This was, relatively speaking, the largest-scale operation conducted to date by ARVN forces against NVA base areas in Cambodia. It was a successful operation; but our success was not as great as expected. One reason for this was that the enemy had deliberately avoided engagement. Perhaps the enemy had known in advance about our plans. Several days prior to initiating the operation, III Corps authorities had flown back and forth into Cambodia to gather information from and coordinate activities with Khmer agencies and units in the area of operation. Also, ARVN reconnaissance parties had preceded the actual incursion into the area of operation by two days for the establishment of river-crossing facilities and supply bases. It was also possible that the short duration of the operation did not permit careful search of all objective areas.



In support of the operation, VNAF tactical aircraft, to include A-1H's and A-37's, flew a total of 194 missions. No U.S. aircraft were involved. Although the operation was conducted without the actual participation of U.S. forces or U.S. advisers, the U.S. Field Force II and advisers had contributed much to its success, first by assisting in developing combat plans and then by providing support for the transportation of M4T6 pontoons required for river-crossing, a capability that III Corps engineers did not have. These river-crossing facilities enabled ARVN task forces to advance as quickly as planned.

Exploiting enemy documents captured by ARVN forces during the operation, our intelligence learned that the area of operation had been the sanctuary for the following enemy units and organizations:

- 1st and 2d Battalion, 271st Regiment, NVA 9th Division
- Local force unit of the Trang Bang District
- Training and Communication Platoon, 2d Sub-Military Region
- Training Platoon, Duc Hue District
- Military Hospital, 2d Sub-MR and COSVN
- Medical Unit, 2d Sub-MR
- Depot and Receiving Platoon, 6th Sub-MR
- N-10 Sapper Unit, 6th Sub-MR

Among enemy prisoners, there were eight squad and platoon leaders belonging to the 2d Battalion 271st Regiment, NVA 9th Division and three others from the 1st Battalion, same regiment. One among them was an ARVN reserve officer trainee abducted by the VC in 1968. ARVN operational forces also freed two instructors of the Dinh Tuong Training Center being detained by the enemy.

#### CUU LONG/SD9/06

Prior to 30 April 1970, IV Corps coordinated with local Khmer authorities in areas adjacent to the RVN border for the conduct of limited operations. One of these operations was launched on 20 April 1970 when elements of the ARVN 9th Infantry Division attacked the area west of the Crow's Nest, about 6 km inside Cambodia, with the support of armor and artillery.

During this operation, which was code-named CUU LONG/SD9/06, our forces clashed violently with the enemy, killing 187 while suffering 24 dead and 111 wounded. Our forces also found and seized an important enemy weapon cache containing in excess of 1,000 assorted weapons and large quantities of ammunition. U.S. advisers were not permitted to accompany ARVN units during this operation; they all remained in South Vietnam, monitoring their units' progress and assisting with support. A total of 30 CH-47 helicopter sorties were used to carry captured weapons and ammunition back to the RVN. However, the ammunition cache was so large that it was impossible to transport all of it back safely by helicopters. Therefore, after 30 sorties, the IV Corps Commander decided to destroy the remainder on the spot. After three days of operation, the 9th Division returned to South Vietnam on 23 April. To avoid adverse propaganda by the enemy, our forces made a determined effort to haul back every item of equipment damaged during the fighting. Those items which could not be moved back were all destroyed.

On 28 April, territorial forces of Kien Tuong Province made another foray into the Crow's Nest area with the support of 9th Division artillery units positioned on the RVN side of the border. After two days of activities which all took place within a distance of three km inside Cambodia, the Kien Tuong territorial forces had killed 43 and captured two enemy, while suffering two killed and 42 wounded. As in the previous operation conducted by the 9th Division, no U.S. advisers had accompanied ARVN forces into Cambodia. But in both operations, ARVN forces were supported by U.S. command helicopters and gunships. During the incursion by the Kien Tuong territorial forces on 28 April, U.S. medevac helicopters were authorized to fly into Cambodia for the evacuation of downed U.S. pilots. VNAF helicopters, however, were responsible for the evacuation of ARVN soldiers wounded in Cambodia.

In addition to the two large raids described above, the territorial forces of Kien Tuong Province, under the command of the Province Chief, raided an area northwest of Kompong Rau, Svay Rieng Province, about 3 km inside Cambodia. This was from 28 to 30 April 1970, and was supported by a unit of the 9th Division Artillery, positioned on the RVN

side of the border. Friendly losses were two killed and 42 wounded. Enemy losses were 43 killed and 88 captured; two crew-served weapons were taken. The results from these raids were significant, but were limited due to their scope and the relatively small forces committed. It was clear to the JGS that a U.S./RVNAF operation, which would penetrate deeper into Cambodia, was needed. Furthermore, this combined operation should be mounted as soon as possible to prevent the enemy from safely evacuating his personnel and materiel from these areas.

## CHAPTER IV

### The Combined Incursion

During the period 30 April through 30 June 1970, the Republic of Vietnam and United States conducted combined and well coordinated operations across the border into Cambodia. They were generally divided into three groups based on the Military Region from which they were initiated; code names were selected by the ARVN and U.S. Army commanders concerned:

TOAN THANG (Total Victory), for operations conducted by  
III Corps and the U.S. Field Force II.

CUU LONG (Mekong), for operations conducted by IV Corps  
and the Delta Military Assistance Command (DMAC).

BINH TAY (Tame the West), for operations conducted by  
II Corps and the U.S. Field Force I. (*Map 10*)

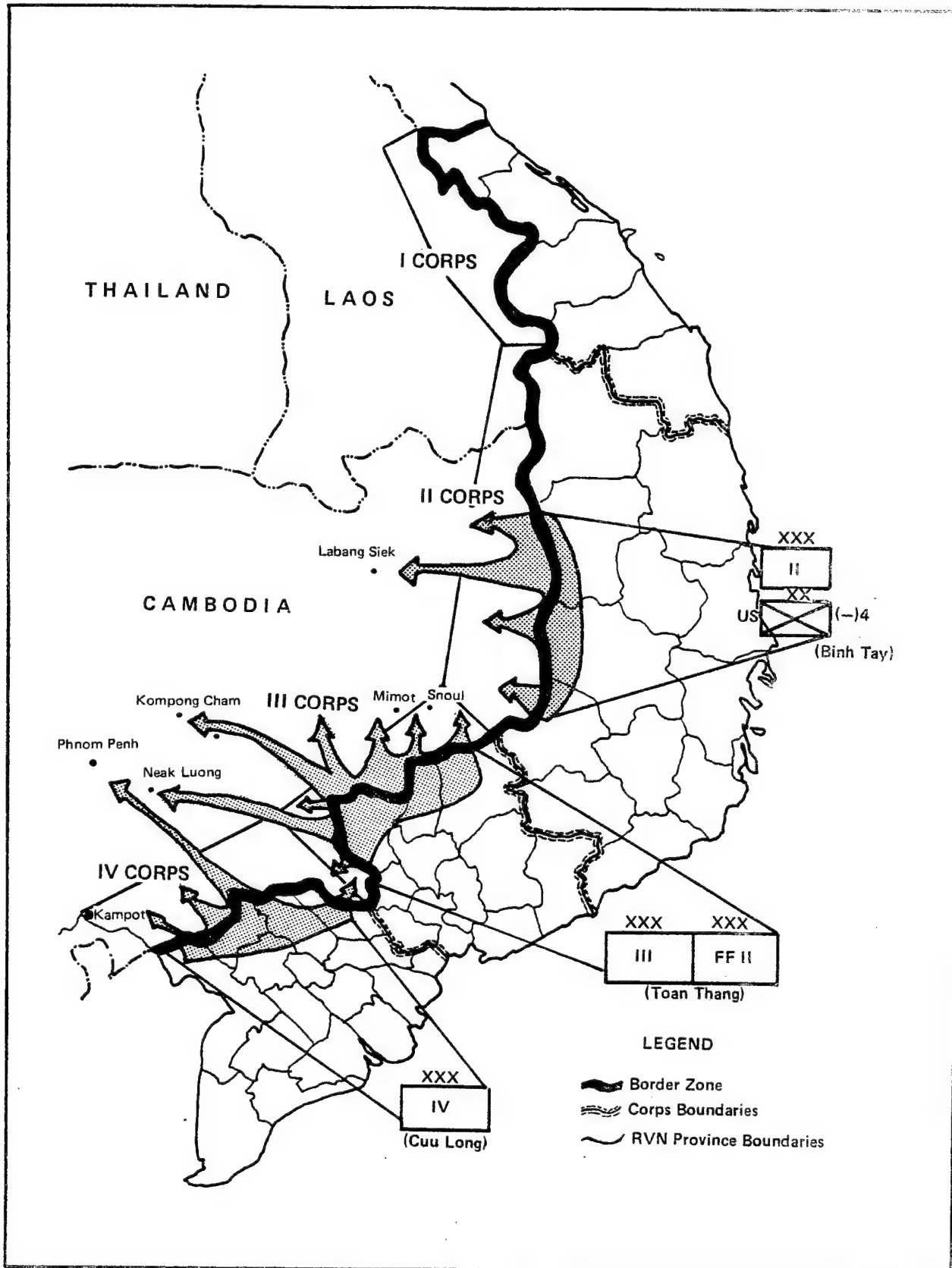
#### TOAN THANG 42

TOAN THANG 42 was a six-phase operation, five phases of which were conducted during the combined incursion. The sixth phase was conducted by the Vietnamese after 30 June 1970. This section will discuss the first four phases, and a joint III Corps-IV Corps operation conducted in the general area of TOAN THANG 42. The first two phases took place in the Parrot's Beak and Angel Wing areas; the third southwest of Kompong Trach, and the fourth along Highway 1. (*Map 11*)

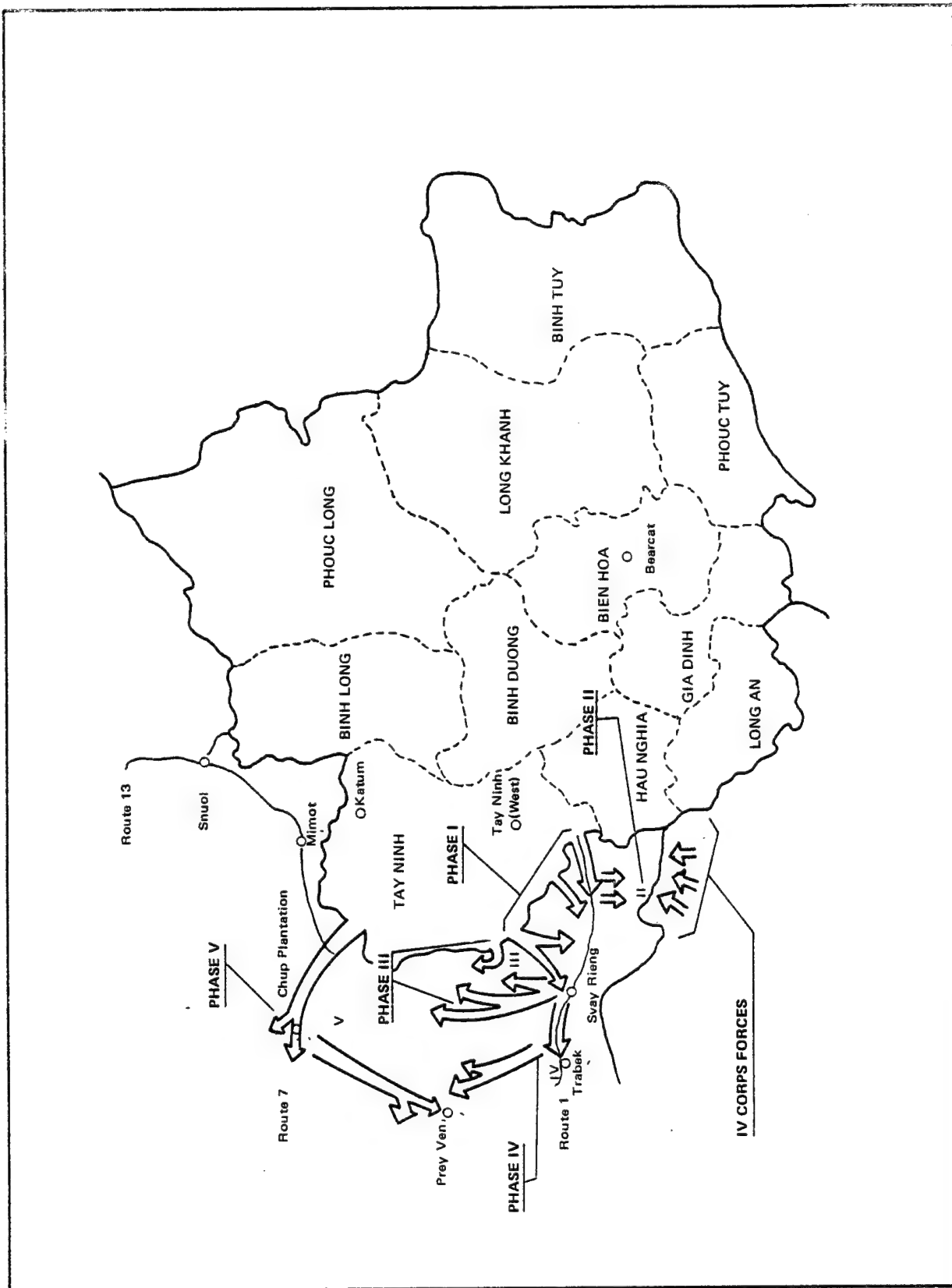
#### TOAN THANG 42, Phase I

After the short, three-day foray into Cambodia during TOAN THANG 41,

Map 10—Major Areas of Operation for the Combined Incursion



Map 11 - Operation TOAN THANG 42



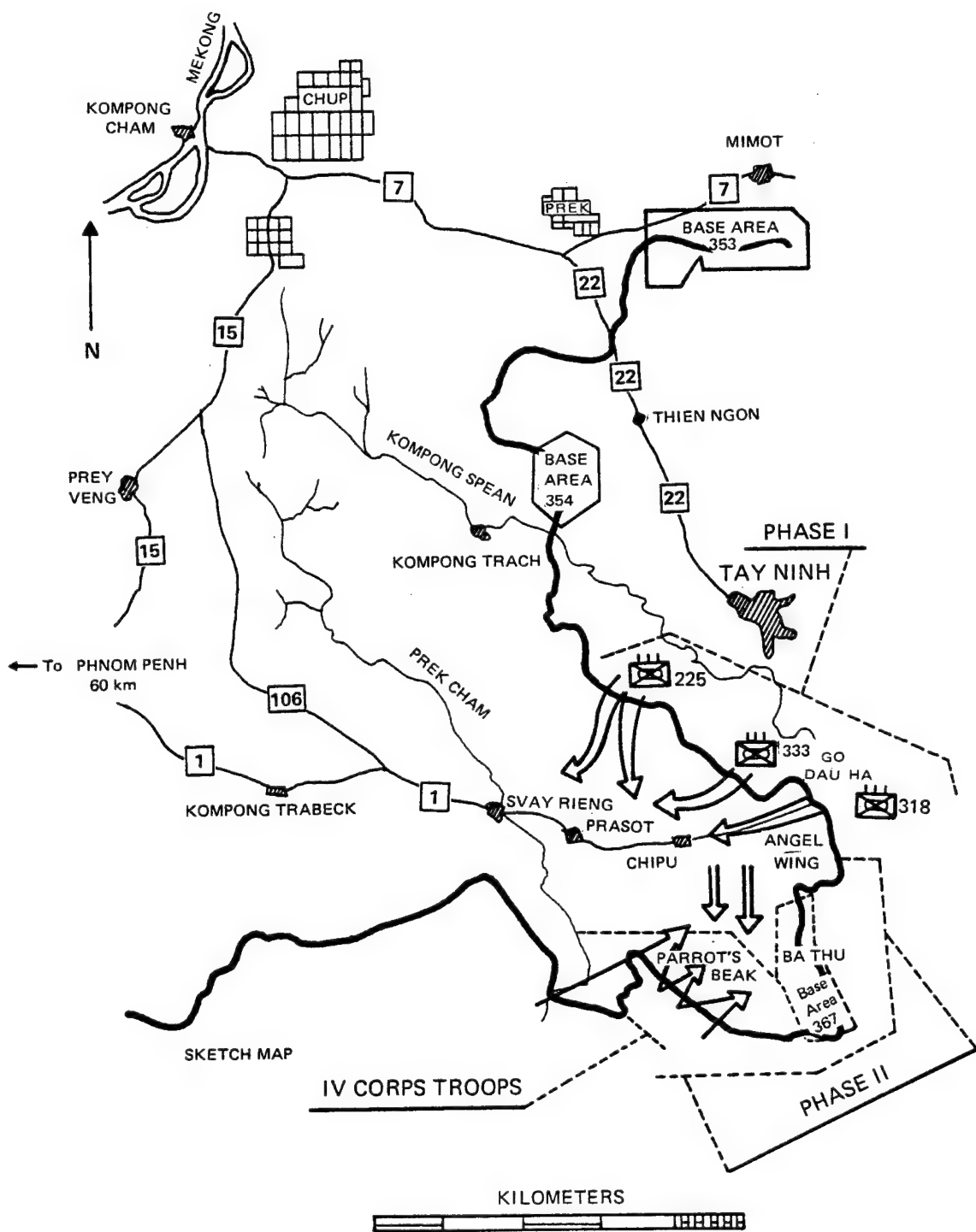
the JGS and MACV felt it was necessary to launch immediately several other large-scale operations for the rapid destruction of enemy bases on Cambodian territory. After TOAN THANG 41, the enemy was no doubt aware of follow-up actions and the longer our forces delayed, the more time the enemy would have to displace his stores and caches deeper inside Cambodia.

On 14 April 1970, therefore, the JGS directed III Corps to coordinate with the U.S. Field Force II for the initiation of an operation with the objectives of destroying and neutralizing NVA bases in Svay Rieng Province of Cambodia, securing Route No. 1 for the ground repatriation of Vietnamese residents in Cambodia, clearing enemy pressure, and assisting Khmer forces in this area. (Map 12) A limited III Corps staff developed operational plans in coordination with U.S. advisers. General McAuliffe, who was then Deputy Senior Adviser, III Corps, provided every advisory assistance required for the development of plans. On 27 April 1970, these plans were completed.

ARVN forces which were to participate in this operation consisted of two armored cavalry squadrons organic to III Corps, augmented by two others organic to the 25th and 5th Infantry Divisions respectively, one infantry regiment of the 25th Division, and four ranger battalions of the 2d Ranger Group which was organic to III Corps. These units were organized into infantry-armor task forces, designated 318, 225 and 333, and placed under the command of III Corps Headquarters. The activation of these task forces in fact had taken place as early as at the beginning of March 1970. They were to serve as III Corps's reserve strike forces then but actually did not have any opportunity to operate as task forces, except for TF 225 whose major components were organic to the 25th Division. As far as logistic support for the operation was concerned, the 3d Area Logistic Command had obtained some experience during the recent TOAN THANG 41 operation. Several shortcomings detected during that operation concerning combat operations, coordination, liaison, and tactics had been remedied.

On 28 April 1970, all three ARVN task forces moved into a staging area opposite the area of operation. TF 318 was deployed along Route No. 1 east of Go Dau Ha; TF 225 and TF 333 were assembled

Map 12 - Areas of Operation for TOAN THANG 42, Phases I and II





northeast of this district town. III Corps Forward was established within the premises of Go Dau Ha district headquarters. ARVN logistic support units of the 3d ALC meanwhile installed their forward supply bases along Route No. 1 about four km east of the district town.

On the morning of 29 April 1970, the ARVN task forces crossed the border after preparatory bombardments of target areas by tactical aircraft and artillery. TF 318 advanced westward along Route No. 1 while TF 225 and TF 333 moved west and south. During the first two days, all ARVN task forces made heavy contact with the enemy while advancing toward their objectives. Where enemy contact was light, ARVN armor and infantry units made use of their organic firepower to rapidly overwhelm enemy forces and occupy the objectives. Artillery and tactical air were used on targets of heavy enemy resistance. Captured enemy personnel and materiel were immediately transported back to South Vietnam by VNAF helicopters. When large caches were discovered, they were either guarded, pending evacuation, or destroyed. These procedures were consistently used throughout the operation.

With regard to the enemy, the element of surprise no longer existed as soon as ARVN task forces had occupied their initial objectives. During the first two days of the operation, the enemy had put up a fierce resistance, inflicting on friendly forces 16 killed and 157 wounded. For his part, the enemy suffered 84 killed and 65 weapons captured. Friendly casualties were high because the enemy had solid fortifications and resisted stubbornly. At the same time, ARVN armored units lacked aggressiveness and did not move forward when contact was made. They would stay behind and provide support for the more audacious ranger and infantry units which always charged ahead. Sometimes, ARVN armored vehicles were unable to fire in support because of infantry troops moving in front of them. This greatly reduced the effectiveness of armored firepower. But these shortcomings were gradually corrected by Task Force Commanders.

On 1 May 1970, TF 225 and TF 333 were resupplied in preparation for Phase II of the operation. TF 318 meanwhile received orders to

advance toward Svay Rieng. Its mission was to clear enemy pressure on that provincial capital, protect Route No. 1 from Svay Rieng to Chipu, and assist the voluntary return to South Vietnam of Vietnamese residents living in this area. Route No. 1 also became an important supply route not only for this operation but also for the entire Cambodian incursion. In preparation for Phase II of this operation, the 51st Ranger Battalion and the 3d Battalion (Mobile Strike Force) were replaced by the 4/48 and 3/52 Battalions respectively in the afternoon. Both replaced battalions had suffered heavy losses during the previous two days.

#### TOAN THANG 42, Phase II

This was an operation conducted jointly by III Corps and IV Corps forces against Base Area 367. It began on 2 May 1970 when Task Forces 333 and 225 from their positions south of Route No. 1 attacked southward into the Parrot's Beak area while Task Force 318, which was commanded by Colonel Tran Quang Khoi, received orders to attack westward along Route No. 1 in an effort to clear the southern part of Svay Rieng. (Map 12)

From Kien Tuong Province further south, a large ARVN force from IV Corps was pushing north. This force consisted of the 9th Infantry Division, five armored cavalry squadrons and one ranger group. It was moving northward along three different axes and was to link up with III Corps forces at a point south of the Parrot's Beak.

During the first day, TF 225 made heavy contact with the enemy 12 km south of Chipu. The task force was supported by both RVN and U.S. tactical air and artillery, since U.S. forces had been authorized to conduct operations on Cambodia territory beginning 30 April 1970. Support for friendly forces, therefore, had become stronger. The enemy broke contact after he had suffered 54 killed and 19 captured. Our casualties were 10 killed and 51 wounded. Westward, meanwhile, TF 333 also engaged the enemy heavily, causing him 79 killed and 15 captured and seizing 31 assorted weapons. The task force suffered 6 killed and 21 wounded.

On 3 May 1970, III Corps task forces linked up with IV Corps units from the south. The forces from both Corps then continued searching for enemy installations and supply caches in this area.

While ARVN forces were conducting attacks against enemy Base Areas 706 and 367 to the west in Svay Rieng Province, the U.S. 1st Air Cavalry Division and 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, in cooperation with the ARVN Airborne Division, launched another offensive effort into the Fishhook area north of Binh Long Province on 1 May 1970.

Fighting by that time had spread over almost the entire border area. Cambodian refugees fleeing war hazards spilled over the border and came into South Vietnam in increasing numbers, particularly in the provinces of Tay Ninh and Binh Long. To solve this problem, Lt. General Do Cao Tri, III Corps Commander, met with the Khmer Military Region 1 Commander at III Corps Forward in Go Dau Ha on 3 May 1970. During the meeting, Lt. General Tri requested that a Khmer official with full authority be placed in charge of Khmer people seeking refuge in South Vietnam. The Khmer commander promised that this official would be made available within two days. At the same time, he asked III Corps to provide the Khmer official in charge of refugees with transportation during his stay in South Vietnam. The Khmer Commander also asked the RVNAF to assist in clearing Route No. 1 from the north and south because this task was beyond the FANK capabilities. At that time, the portion of Route No. 1 which ran from Svay Rieng to Neak Luong on the Mekong River was being interdicted by NVA forces. As a result, all communications between Cambodia's eastern provinces and Phnom Penh had been interrupted.

All requests by the Khmer Military Region 1 commander were promptly approved by Lt. General Do Cao Tri. In turn, Lt. General Tri mentioned the fact that there were about 4,000 Vietnamese residents being detained in Khmer concentration camps in Svay Rieng Province. He informed the Khmer commander that III Corps would send over a representative to take charge of formalities concerning the repatriation of these Vietnamese and that assistance from the Svay Rieng local

government would be needed. After three days of combined operations with III Corps, IV Corps forces began to withdraw from the area of operation on 5 May 1970. Meanwhile, TF 333 and TF 225 also fell back and assembled along Route No. 1 to be resupplied.

After regular ARVN forces had vacated the Parrot's Beak area to prepare for the next phase of the operation, Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) and Regional Force units of Tay Ninh Province were redeployed from the Angel's Wing to the Parrot's Beak area in order to continue the search for enemy stores and caches. On the same day, the U.S. 6/31 Infantry and the 3d Brigade, U.S. 9th Division also moved into the area to prevent the enemy from returning.

After the completion of Phase II, TOAN THANG 42, III Corps Forward Command Post was moved from Go Dau Ha into Tay Ninh City on 6 May 1970. It was from Tay Ninh that III Corps directed all operational efforts during the remaining period of the combined incursion. Tay Ninh City was far more convenient for a CP of such importance having ample space for cantonment and an airfield nearby. The 3d Area Logistics Command (ALC) and other supporting units also relocated to Tay Ninh City. (Map 11)

#### IV Corps Participation with III Corps in TOAN THANG 42, Phase II

On 2 May 1970, a large IV Corps task force composed of the ARVN 9th Infantry Division, five armored cavalry squadrons (each with three M-113 troops), and the 4th Ranger group participated in Phase II of Operation TOAN THANG 42 alongside III Corps forces. This IV Corps task force was commanded by Major General Nguyen Viet Thanh, IV Corps Commander, assisted by Brigadier General Tran Ba Di, 9th Division Commander. (Map 12)

The IV Corps task force was organized into four armor-infantry elements which moved north from Kien Tuong Province into Cambodia on three axes, to link up with III Corps forces in the Parrot's Beak area. This was the largest operation conducted by IV Corps after its two previous limited incursions. The IV Corps armor-infantry task force advanced rapidly on predetermined axes in conventional

warfare style, taking advantage of its strong firepower and mobility. During its advance, the task force enveloped the objective area, cutting it up into several small pockets to facilitate search and destroy operations. Prior to the incursion by IV Corps forces, the objective area had been pounded for two hours by preparatory fire provided by the U.S. 23d Artillery group and IV Corps artillery units.

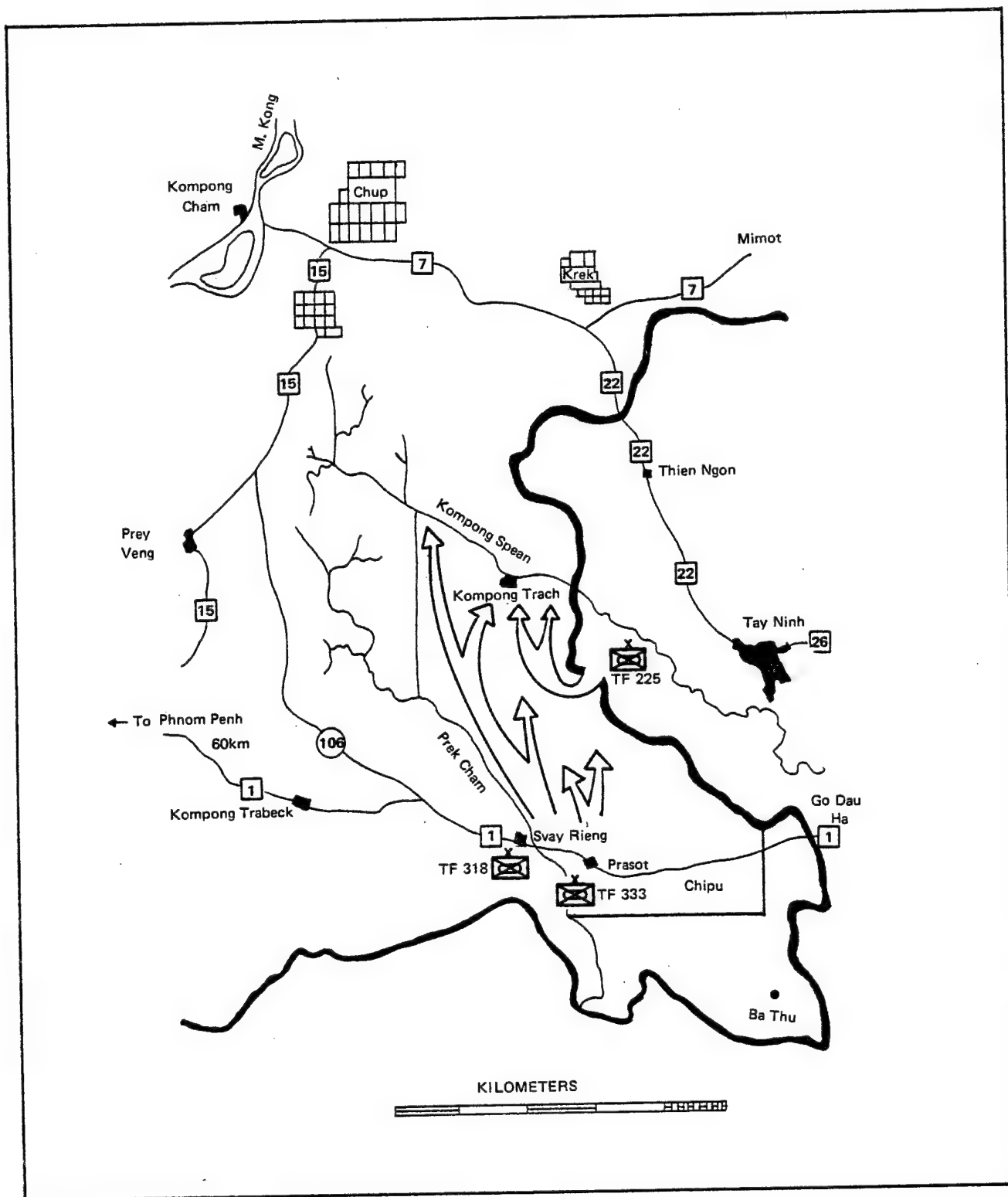
During two days of heavy engagement with the enemy, the IV Corps task force discovered and seized several important enemy weapon and supply caches. At the conclusion of the three-day operation conducted in cooperation with III Corps, the IV Corps task force had killed 1,010 enemy, captured 204 others and received 19 ralliers; its own casualties amounted to 66 killed and 330 wounded. In addition, the task force seized a total of over 1,000 individual and 60 crew-served weapons, including seven 120-mm mortars and five 75-mm recoilless rifles. It also captured and destroyed in excess of 100 tons of assorted ammunition. On 5 May, IV Corps armor-infantry elements withdrew from the area in order to prepare for the next stage of cross-border operations.

#### TOAN THANG 42, Phase III

After destroying enemy installations and stores south of Route No. 1, III Corps forces switched their offensive efforts northward. During this phase of the operation, U.S. Naval and VNN units were active along the Kompong Spean River, forming a screen to the east. One element of the U.S. 25th Infantry Division also operated in the northeast. (*Map 13*)

On the morning of 7 May 1970, Task Force 225 attacked westward from Ben Soi, linking up with Task Force 318 which attacked northward from the Prasot - Chipu area. Task Force 333 remained in reserve. During the day, both task forces made contact with the enemy. In particular, TF 318 engaged the enemy at 10 km north of Prasot, killing 182 and capturing 8. To the east in the meantime, TF 225 discovered an enemy hospital with a 200-bed capacity and seized quantities of surgical equipment and medicine.

Map 13 - Area of Operation for TOAN THANG 42, Phase III



In the afternoon of 9 May, after both task forces had linked up in an area southwest of Kompong Trach, Task Force 318 pushed northward across the Kompong Spean River. Then both task forces continued searching for enemy installations and stores until 11 May 1970.

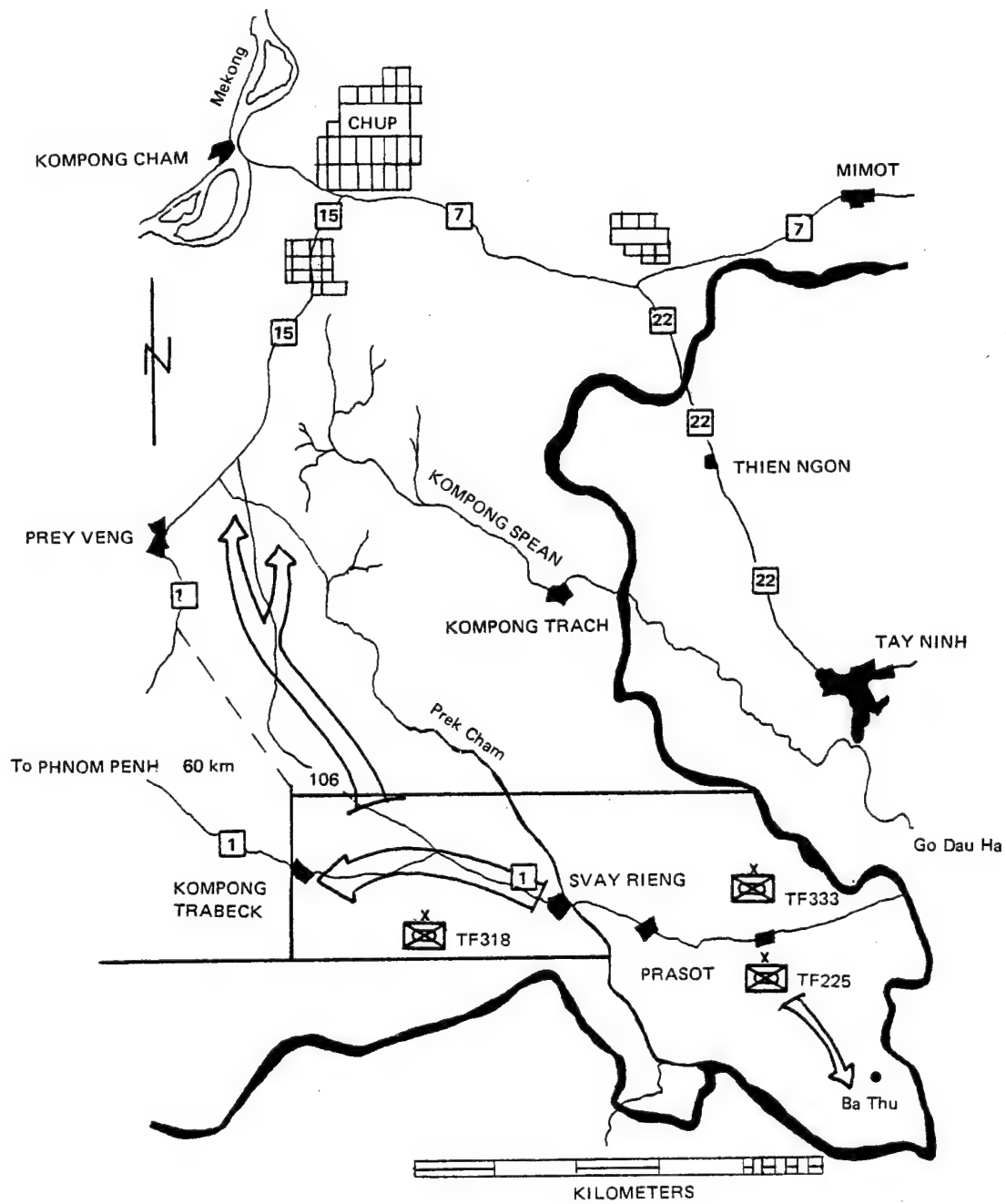
On 11 May 1970, President Nguyen Van Thieu made an inspection visit to ARVN units in the field, accompanied by Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky. After being briefed by Lt. General Tri on the results of the operation, President Thieu informed him of the general situation throughout Cambodia which was becoming more serious with every passing day. Our residents in Phnom Penh were being badly mistreated by Khmer authorities and needed to be repatriated as soon as possible. To evacuate them, he ordered that III Corps quickly clear Route No. 1 and be prepared to relieve Kompong Trach when required.

#### TOAN THANG 42, Phase IV

As a result of President Thieu's directives, Lt. General Do Cao Tri immediately redeployed his forces. Task Forces 318, 333, and 225 were withdrawn from the Kampong Trach area and assembled along Route No. 1 from Chipu to Svay Rieng the same day in order to prepare for TOAN THANG 42, Phase IV. This operation was launched on 13 May 1970 for the purposes of clearing Route No. 1 and making way for the repatriation of Vietnamese residents of Phnom Penh. (Map 14) All three task forces with TF 318 taking the lead, moved westward along Route No. 1 from Svay Rieng. They were to link up with IV Corps Forces at Kampong Trabek (during that time, IV Corps was conducting an operation to clear the Mekong River). To replace the regular ARVN forces that just moved out, two Regional Force company groups of Tay Ninh Province were introduced into the area to secure Route No. 1 from Go Dau Ha to Svay Rieng.

During its advance on 14 May, TF 333 had heavy contact with the enemy, killing 48 and capturing 56. All prisoners declared they belonged to the D1 Battalion of Tay Ninh. Meanwhile, TF 225, which operated south of Route No. 1, also made contact with the enemy, killing 26 and capturing 20 prisoners who declared that they belonged to the 3d Battalion, 2nd Regiment.

Map 14— Area of Operation for TOAN THANG 42, Phase IV





On 20 May, TF 333 made contact with an element of the 2nd Battalion, 27th Regiment NVA 9th Division, killing 9 and capturing 26. All III Corps forces then continued securing Route No. 1 from Svay Rieng to Kompong Trabek until 21 May.

While directing the operation to clear Route No. 1 from Svay Rieng to Kompong Trabek, Lt. General Tri also sought to coordinate an attack by IV Corps forces along the Mekong River toward Kompong Cham. However, Lt. General Ngo Dzu, IV Corps Commander, disagreed because he felt it too remote an objective for his corps. At the same time, Lt. General Tri also planned to reinforce Kompong Cham with an ARVN Ranger battalion as a show of force, but this was never done. Therefore, after clearing Route No. 1, and after III Corps had linked up with IV Corps forces on 14 May, Lt. General Tri decided to send a liaison team to Kompong Cham to monitor the situation there. Lt. General Tri's interim arrangement would provide for the support of Kompong Cham by tactical air through the liaison team, pending a relief action by ARVN units.

By 22 May 1970, Route No. 1 was considered cleared. A most regrettable incident occurred that day; when travelling by jeep on Route No. 1 from Svay Reing to Kompong Trabek, three ARVN personnel of III Corps were fired upon by a group of unidentified soldiers. Two of them were wounded but escaped; the third was missing and the vehicle was set afire. The III Corps Commander was very angry when learning of this incident. He did not believe that it was an enemy attack because Route No. 1 was considered secure. Rather, he thought it the act of unruly Khmer soldiers in possible retaliation for reports of misconduct by ARVN soldiers in Cambodia. Colonel Le Dat Cong, G-2, III Corps conducted the investigation, and confirmed, however, that the VC had indeed attacked the ARVN jeep.

At about the same time, the Khmer press in Phnom Penh carried front page stories alleging that RVNAF units, while operating in Cambodia, had been repressive against the Khmer population and had ransacked Khmer properties. The Khmer press also asked the RVNAF

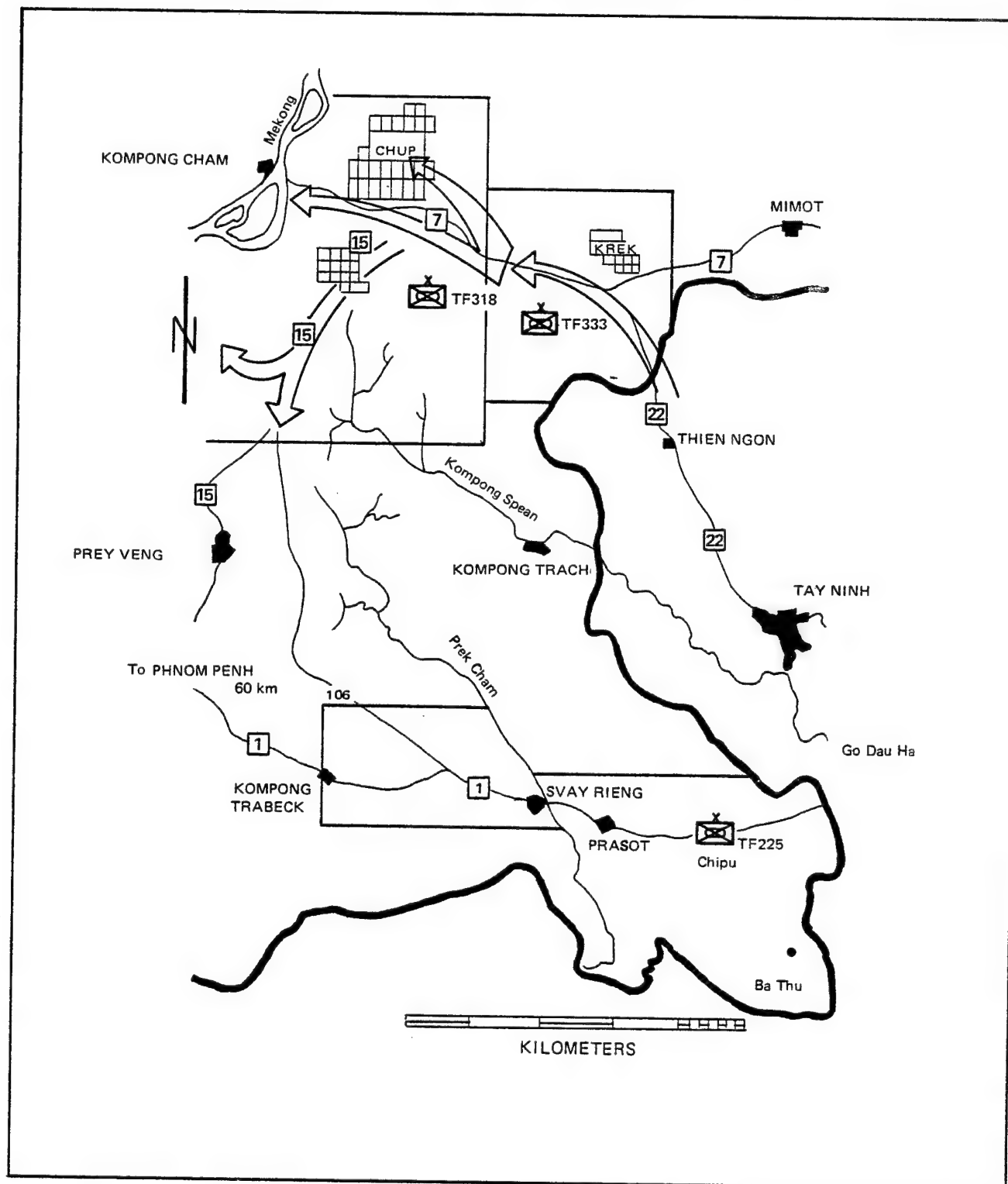
to withdraw from Cambodia. Lt. General Do Cao Tri felt hurt and was angered by these press articles. He considered this outcry to be an insult to the RVNAF. He privately ordered an investigation and was determined to provide adequate punishment and enforce strict military discipline in case the stories were proven true. In case they were not, he made the decision to recommend to the JGS and President Thieu that the ARVN liaison team at Kompong Cham should be called back and that all air support missions for the benefit of FANK forces should be terminated.

### *The Relief of Kompong Cham*

Kompong Cham was the third largest city in Cambodia and was the seat of the Khmer Military Region 1 Headquarters. The mission of relieving this important Cambodian town, located on the Mekong northwest of the Chup Plantation, was given to the III Corps Commander who designated the operation TOAN THANG 42, Phase V. (Map 15) The city was defended by a garrison of four Khmer infantry battalions. But, because of low strength, these four battalions had only 1,000 men; artillery support was provided by a battery of four 105-mm howitzers with approximately 1,000 rounds.

Beginning on 12 May 1970, NVA forces of the 9th Division occupied the Chup plantation area northeast of Kompong Cham. They shelled the city and mounted sniper attacks against its eastern part. The Kompong Cham airfield, northwest of the city was rendered unusable, being shelled constantly day and night. Communication by way of the Mekong River, from Phnom Penh to Kompong Cham, was also interdicted. The city was then effectively isolated, increasing the problem of food and ammunition shortage. The garrison's morale was at a low ebb; its troops were wondering for how long they could hold under the siege.

Map 15 – The Relief of Kompong Cham (TOAN THANG 42, Phase V)



To relieve Kompong Cham from the enemy's siege, IV Corps initiated operation TOAN THANG 42, Phase V, beginning on 23 May 1970. Task Forces 333 and 318 moved on Route No. 7 from Krek and on Route No. 15 from Prey Veng, respectively, both converging north toward an area in the vicinity of the Chup plantation. As soon as it moved out from Krek toward Chup, the 7th ABN Battalion of TF 333 was engaged heavily by the enemy. With effective support from U.S. tactical air and gunships, TF 333 quickly controlled the situation, killing 26 enemy and capturing 16. The enemy force was the 2d Battalion, 272d Regiment, NVA 9th Division. Two days later on 25 May, armor and ranger elements of Task Force 318 clashed violently with the enemy south of Route No. 7. The fighting did not abate until the next morning.

While both task forces were engaging the enemy on their way to relieve Kompong Cham, the RF units of Tay Ninh Province and CIDG forces from the Duc Hua and Tre Cu camps also made heavy contact with the enemy in the Angel's Wing area. Friendly forces killed 38 and captured 21 enemy while suffering no casualties.

During the day of 28 May, while continuing to advance toward the Chup Plantation, TF 318 again engaged the enemy in heavy fighting, causing him 73 killed, while we suffered 16 wounded. Task Force 225, which was meanwhile operating south of Route No. 1, found additional enemy supply caches and seized a total of 14 tons of assorted ammunition, seven radio sets, four 60-mm mortars, three 82-mm mortars, two 120-mm mortars and one 75-mm howitzer.

Fighting then raged throughout the next day between TF's 318 and 333 and elements of the NVA 9th Division in the area north of Chup. Meanwhile, TF 225 also engaged the enemy heavily in the Angel's Wing area with the support of friendly artillery and tactical air. Enemy anti-aircraft fire was particularly heavy during the fighting, causing one VNAF Skyraider, one U.S. F-100 and one Cobra gunship to be downed.

On 1 June 1970, as the fighting ceased, the clearing of Chup plantation was considered accomplished. However, ARVN forces continued

to search for enemy supply caches in this area and expanded their activities to the northeast in an effort to clear enemy pressure from east of Kompong Cham.

To provide continued rest and recuperation for the task forces, III Corps rotated them from combat duties. On 3 June, therefore, TF 318 was taken out of Cambodia and directed to Long Khanh for a full week of rest and refitting. On 12 June, this task force moved to the Krek area and relieved TF 333. In TF 225, the 46th regiment took the place of the 49th, which returned to its rear headquarters for rest and refitting. However, TF 225 continued to operate in the Angel's Wing area north of Route No. 1.

During the period that III Corps forces were withdrawing from the Chup area, elements of the enemy 9th Division were moving in, laying siege to Kompong Cham once more.

On 19 June 1970, during a meeting at the Independence Palace with the Chairman, Joint General Staff and the four ARVN Corps Commanders to reassess the cross border operations, President Thieu concluded that the RVNAF would continue operations in Cambodia despite the withdrawal of U.S. forces planned for 30 June. He also ordered III Corps to proceed with the relief of Kompong Cham for the second time. Additionally, Cambodians were to be prevented from seeking refuge in South Vietnam because according to enemy prisoners and reliable sources, NVA troops were attempting to infiltrate by passing as refugees.

To accomplish the relief of Kompong Cham as ordered, III Corps deployed its Task Forces 318, 333 and 225 on 21 June. All three task forces attacked toward Chup along Route No. 7 from Krek. After six days of operations, the Chup area and the area southeast of Kompong Cham were practically cleared of enemy forces. To further clear the area south of Kompong Cham, Route No. 15, and the Prey Veng area, III Corps forces were deployed south from Chup toward Prey Veng. TF 318 left the 33d Ranger Battalion and 1/18 Armored Cavalry Squadron in positions along Route No. 15 to protect this vital supply line. This was done in the light of intelligence reports that the 1st

Regiment, NVA 9th Division was attempting to interdict Route No. 15 and ambush TF 318 on its way to relieve Prey Veng. Enroute, TF 318 was heavily engaged by the enemy on 29 June, while it advanced along Route No. 15. (During this phase of the operation which took place beyond the 30 km limit, ARVN units were not accompanied by U.S. advisers). The fighting resulted in 165 enemy killed. Friendly forces suffered 34 killed, 204 wounded and 24 missing in action.

The entire TOAN THANG 42 operation was considered the most successful ever conducted by III Corps. According to depositions made by enemy prisoners and ralliers and in particular, judging by the large quantities of enemy supplies and materials captured, the following conclusions were quickly apparent:

1. The operation had effectively upset the enemy's plans to overthrow the Lon Nol regime and, as soon as he succeeded in Phnom Penh, launch an offensive in RVN MR-3. This was first disclosed by enemy Lt. Colonel Nguyen Thanh, Deputy Commander of Sub Military Region 2 who rallied to the GVN. Note that this activity had moved from its previous location in the Bo Loi Woods to south of Chipu prior to the incursion.

2. The morale of enemy troops had been seriously affected by the operation, particularly among troops under Sub Military Region 2. In a few instances, cadres and troops had refused to go into combat. Many had deserted to avoid fighting.

3. The area of Ba Thu and Angel's Wing, considered invincible, had been heavily damaged. Up to 90% of enemy supplies in this area had been destroyed or seized by the RVNAF. Heavy casualties had effectively reduced enemy troop strength by 25%, especially among Sub MR-2 units and Tay Ninh local force units. As a result, the enemy met with serious difficulties in replacing human and material losses.

This operation also testified to the remarkable progress made by our ARVN logistic system whose efforts to keep ARVN combat units

adequately resupplied were most commendable. A few problem areas still existed such as the shortage of spare parts for armored personnel carriers, which accounted for their high unserviceable rate, despite continuing efforts by U.S. and ARVN repair teams in the field.

*TOAN THANG 43, 44, 45, and 46*

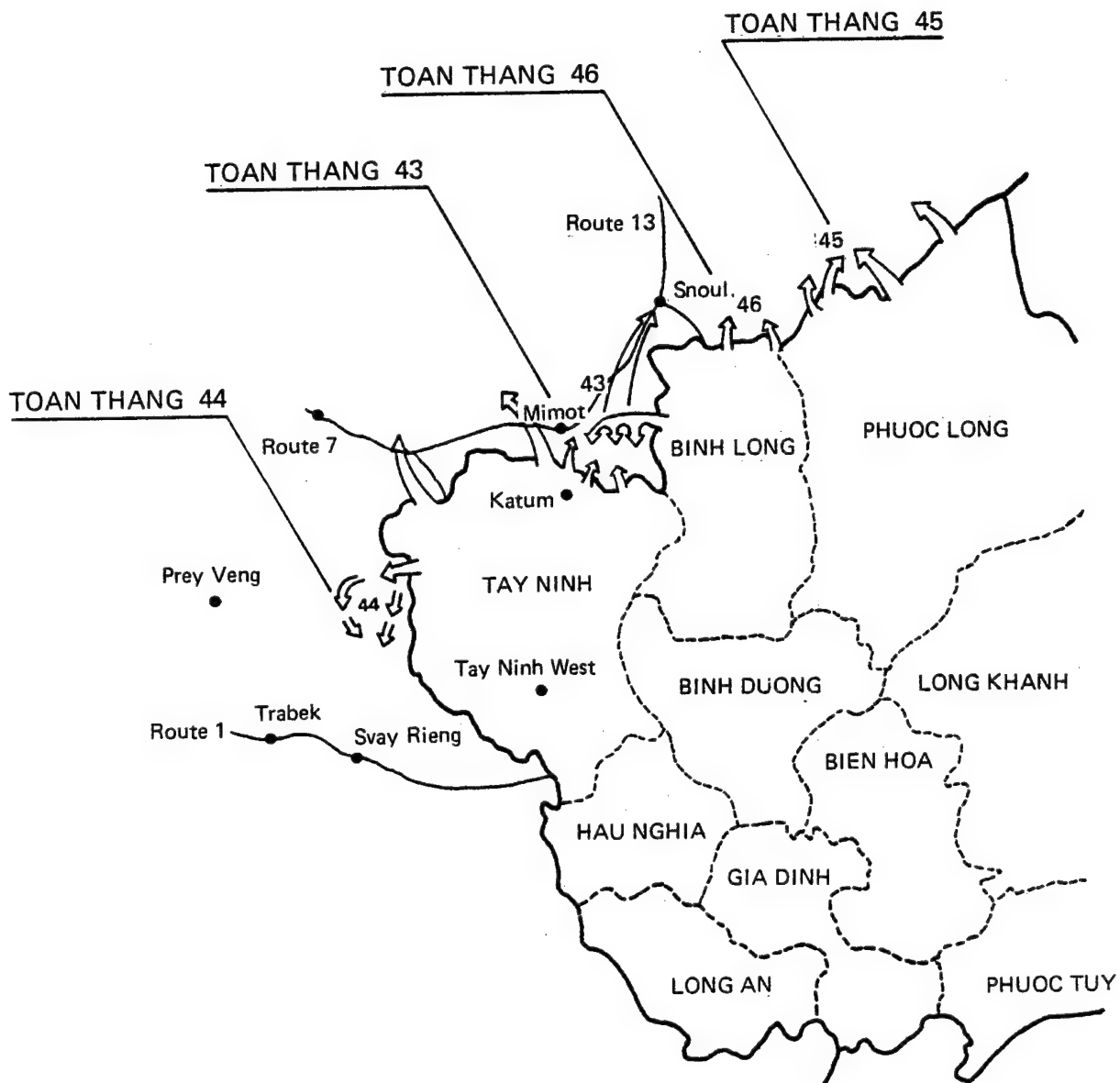
The principal units involved in this series of operations were the ARVN Airborne Division, the U.S. 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile), the U.S. 25th Infantry Division, and the U.S. 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment. They were conducted in the Fishhook area and against Base Areas 350, 351, 352, 353, 354, and 707. (*Map 16*)

TOAN THANG 43

On 26 April 1970, Major General Elvy B. Roberts, commanding the U.S. 1st Cavalry Division, received orders from Lt. General Michael S. Davison, Commander, U.S. II Field Force to prepare for an operation designed to destroy COSVN headquarters located in the Fishhook area on Cambodian territory. The U.S. 1st Cavalry Division was to launch this operation within 72 hours after orders were received. (*Map 17*)

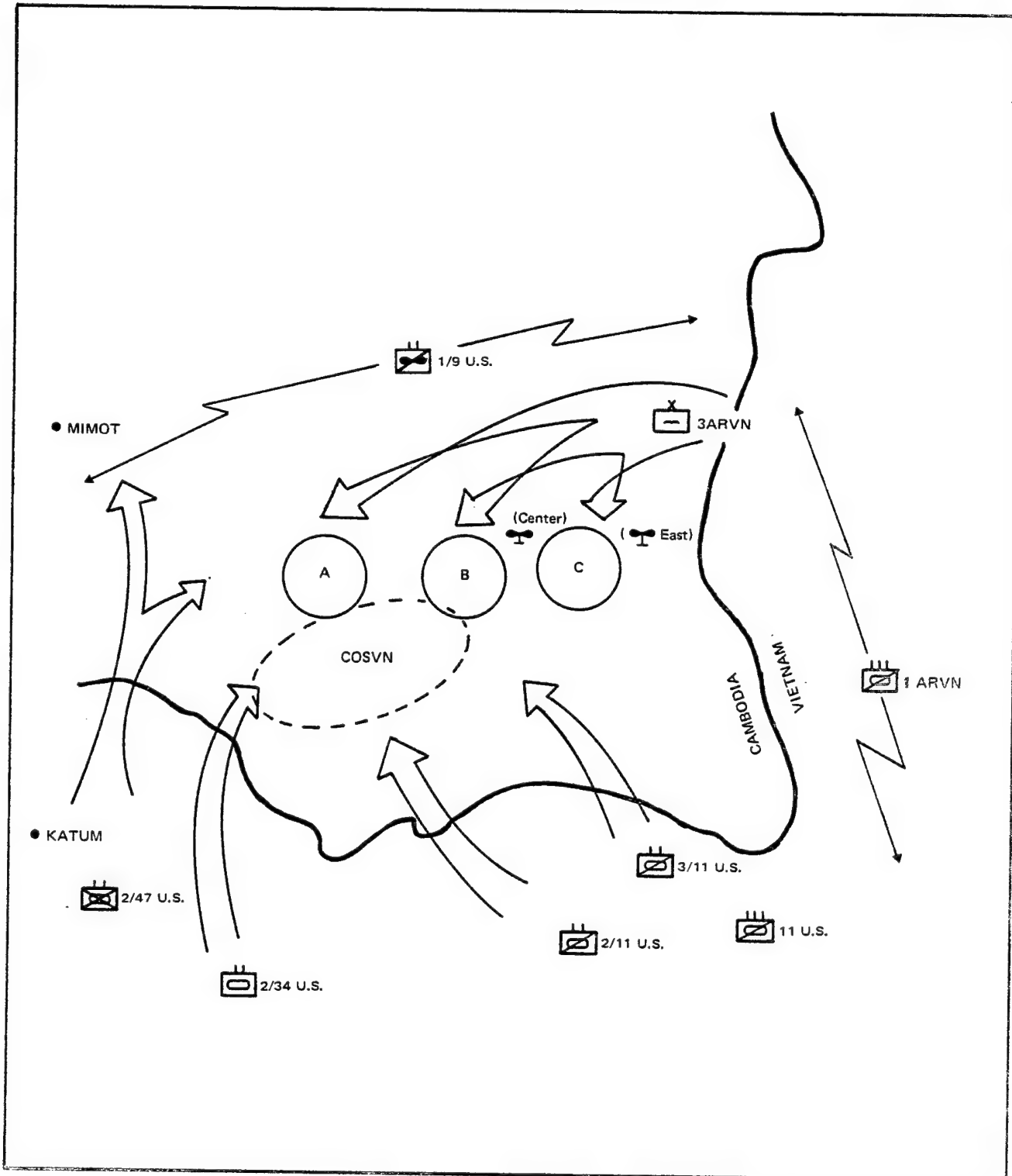
During three consecutive days, from 26 to 28 April, the U.S. 1st Cavalry Division Commander and Lt. General Du Quoc Dong, the Airborne Division Commander, discussed and developed combat plans for the operation. Both units had been operating together in the northernmost provinces of Military Region 3 since the beginning of 1970, within the framework of the Dong Tien campaign, a combined program undertaken by ARVN III Corps and the U.S. II Field Force designed to improve RVNAF combat effectiveness. In their planning, the two division commanders had to review their force dispositions so as to

Map 16 - General Locations for Operations TOAN THANG 43, 44, 45 and 46





Map 17 -- Area of Operation for TOAN THANG 43



be able to assemble adequate units for the cross-border operation and at the same time to ensure that effective security would be maintained in their areas of responsibility in Military Region 3.

To organize the redeployment of units and avoid time-consuming troop movements, the U.S. 1st Cavalry Division and the ARVN Airborne Division commanders requested that their areas of responsibility be extended northward to the limit of the Cambodian border. As the units progressed northward, their fire support bases would also move along so that when the operation was about to be launched across the border, all units participating would already be in position on the RVN side of the border.

On 28 April, the U.S. 1st Cavalry Division Commander received orders to initiate the operation within 48 hours. He immediately met with the ARVN Airborne Division Commander to review plans on the general enemy situation. Both agreed that a combined task force consisting of air cavalry and airborne elements should be employed for the initial stages of the operation. Command and control of this task force was entrusted to Brig. General Robert H. Shoemaker, Deputy Commander, U.S. 1st Cavalry Division; this task force, therefore, was designated Task Force Shoemaker. In the meantime, both division staffs began developing plans for the next stage.

The initial concept of operation as developed by the task force commander, was to employ a combined force consisting of the 3d U.S. Cavalry Brigade (reinforced by one mechanized infantry battalion and one armor battalion), the 3d ARVN ABN Brigade, and the 11th U.S. Armored Cavalry Regiment (11th ACR) in a heliborne assault combined with ground attacks. The plan of operation called for extensive preparatory support by B-52's, tactical air and artillery, followed by the heliborne insertion of the 3d ABN Brigade into three landing zones north of the objective to block the enemy's escape routes. Next, this airborne element would advance south to link up with the task force ( - ) which, in the meantime, would be attacking northward from their positions in the south, with the 3d Brigade, 1st U.S. Cavalry Division to the west, and the 11th ACR to the east and southeast.

The 1/9 U. S. Cavalry was to conduct reconnaissance patrols over the northern part of the area of operation to detect and further block enemy escapes. In conjunction with this pincer movement in Cambodia, the 9th Regiment, 5th ARVN Division and the 1st ARVN Armored Cavalry Squadron were to conduct reconnaissance patrols along the western part of Binh Long Province, opposite the area of operation. After the occupation of preplanned objectives, all units were to continue the search for enemy installations and supply caches in the area of operation.

In the early morning of 1 May 1970, six B-52's began bombing the Fishhook area, their last bomb expended by 0545 hours. Fifteen minutes later, U.S. artillery opened its barrages on the area where the 3d ABN Brigade was to be inserted. At 0630 hours, the 1st Armored Cavalry Squadron of III Corps moved from northwest of An Loc toward the Cambodian border. It was then that the first 15,000 lb. bomb was dropped from a U.S. aircraft to clear a landing zone (LZ East) for the 3d ABN Brigade; 15 minutes later, another 15,000 lb. bomb was detonated, clearing Landing Zone Center. Immediately afterwards, observation planes with forward air controllers aboard overflew the landing area, guiding U.S. tactical aircraft onto targets. The area was thoroughly covered by tactical air from 0700 to 0800 hours.

Further north of the objective area, elements of the 1/9 Air Cavalry detected a number of enemy vehicles moving; they attacked and destroyed two vehicles, killing five enemy troops which provided our first results for the day. These elements then continued patrolling over the landing zone area until 0800 hours.

Ten minutes after the 1/9 Cavalry completed its reconnaissance mission, the first armada of helicopters arrived and inserted an airborne unit at Landing Zone East. Upon touching ground in total safety, the airborne unit began establishing a fire support base with 105-mm and 155-mm howitzers. While the helicopter armada was landing troops, the 11th ACR moved into its assembly area and crossed the line of departure toward the northeast to link up with the 3d Cavalry Brigade (+) which had been airlifted across the border

at 0945 hours.

The 5th Airborne Battalion was helicoptered by an armada of 62 helicopters with escort provided by 22 Cobra gunships into objective B at 0945 hours and into Landing Zone Center at 1005 hours. Meanwhile, to the west, the 9th ABN Battalion also made a heliborne assault on objective A. Both U.S. and ARVN assault forces were surprised by the relative lack of resistance in the objective area. This seemed to conflict with our intelligence reports which had indicated the presence of enemy antiaircraft and, possibly, elements of COSVN headquarters. However, our forces met with no significant enemy resistance. No antiaircraft fire was observed and there was only sporadic, scattered small arms fire. This was a good indication that the enemy had been caught by surprise. He probably had not believed that U.S. and RVN forces would even be able to land in such a rough and heavily covered terrain. Upon landing, both airborne elements, the 5th and 9th Airborne Battalions, saw an enemy force of about 200 fleeing in disorder without fighting. Cobra gunships pursued the escaping enemy troops, killing about 20-30 of them.

By the end of the first day, friendly forces had achieved remarkable results. The U.S. 1/9 Cavalry, which covered the northern approaches to the objective area, had detected and attacked several groups of enemy troops attempting to break away, killing a total of 156. U.S. tactical air had flown 185 sorties over the area of operation and accounted for 109 enemy killed. In its assigned area of operation, the 5th Airborne Battalion killed 28 and captured 7 enemy troops. The prisoners revealed they belonged to three different organizations, the 250th Rehabilitation Unit, the 50th Rear Security Unit, and the 1st Battalion, 165th Regiment, NVA 7th Division. The 3d Airborne Battalion discovered an underground cache containing about 6,000 lbs. of medicine and new surgical equipment in original packings. The markings on these boxes indicated that the equipment came from Europe and had been sent to Phnom Penh via Air France. As

for the U.S. 11th ACR, its 2/11 Tank Battalion had engaged and killed 50 enemy while suffering only two dead. It also discovered regimental level troop cantonment facilities.

On 3 May 1970, Task Force Shoemaker was augmented with the U.S. 2d Cavalry Brigade. During that day, several enemy supply caches were found. In particular, the U.S. 1/9 Cavalry, while patrolling in the north, discovered an enemy truck park. Tactical air was called and destroyed seven 2-1/2 ton, thirteen 3/4 ton, and three 1/4 ton trucks.

Subsequently, on 4 May, U.S. air cavalry elements discovered several enemy shelters and a truck network in a jungled area northwest of the area of operation. Observation planes which were sent over that area reported sighting enemy thatch huts and houses and, farther to the south, several radio antennas. Continuing their observation coverage to the northeast, the pilots guided infantry troops into the area and thus enabled them to discover many underground shelters full of weapons and ammunition in addition to several houses. This area contained so many enemy installations and caches that U.S. forces dubbed it "The City".

During an extensive search period from 5 to 13 May, friendly forces discovered a total of 182 weapons and ammunition caches, 18 buildings used as mess halls, a large training base, complete with firing range and a farm to provide chickens and pigs. In addition to weapons and ammunition, the uncovered caches also contained foodstuff, military clothing, medicine, and medical equipment. Most remarkable was the fact that all supplies and material were new. The area called "The City" extended over three square kilometers and was well organized as a supply base with separate receiving and issuing sections. The general condition of buildings and underground shelters indicated that they had been built about two and a half years previously. But several stronger facilities looked as

if they had been constructed during the last six months.

The following is a partial list of enemy supplies and material uncovered in "The City":

- 1,282 individual weapons
- 202 crew-served weapons
- 319,000 rounds of 12.7-mm ammunition
- 25,200 rounds of 14.5-mm antiaircraft ammunition
- 1,555,900 rounds of AK-47 ammunition
- 2,110 hand grenades
- 58,000 lbs. of explosives
- 400,000 rounds of caliber 30 machine gun ammunition
- 22 crates of anti-personnel mines
- 30 tons of rice
- 8 tons of corn
- 1,100 lbs. of salt

Judging from the substantial quantities of supplies found, this area was probably one of the most important enemy supply bases in Cambodia.

On 25 May, friendly forces discovered an enemy vehicle repair and maintenance facility in the same general area. During the next period of search, from 25 May to 9 June 1970, friendly forces found in an adjacent area a depot of signal material containing many valuable items of communications equipment. Just like in "The City", enemy installations in this area were well organized. The storage of equipment was neat and orderly and the arrangements for receiving and issuing revealed a good supply organization. Most items of equipment found were either new or in good working condition.

Unlike the binh trams along the Ho Chi Minh Trail, most of the underground shelters found in Cambodia were full of supplies and war materiel. These supplies and materiel had probably been transported by trucks. This appeared obvious since our forces captured or destroyed a total of 305 assorted vehicles. A few of these vehicles were small passenger cars such as Porsche, Mercedes-Benz and Jeeps; the remainder consisted mostly of cargo-hauling trucks. According

to intelligence reports, however, the number of vehicles discovered in this area represented only a small fraction of the larger fleet of trucks that the enemy used in Cambodia for supply purposes. In fact, prior to the initiation of TOAN THANG 43, our observation planes had sighted several enemy truck convoys leaving the objective area; they were probably moving out part of the supplies and materiel in anticipation of our incursion. The large quantities of stored equipment and supplies found by our forces in this base area, and the enemy's current road system in Cambodia, were indicative of his capability to move several thousand tons of supplies per month. This in turn showed that NVA forces operating along the Cambodian border could always expect to obtain their supplies in a very short time.

While U.S. air cavalry and armor and ARVN airborne units operated with success in the Fishhook area, III Corps and the U.S. Field Force II on 6 May 1970 launched three simultaneous attacks against enemy Base Areas 350 of Binh Long Province, 351 north of Phuoc Long Province, and 354 west of Tay Ninh Province.

#### TOAN THANG 44

Conducted by the U.S. 25th Infantry Division, this operation had the objective of destroying enemy Base Area 354 which was located in Cambodia, west of Tay Ninh Province. Forces participating in this operation consisted of the 1st Brigade, U.S. 25th Division with two mechanized battalions, the 1/5 and 2/22, and two infantry battalions, the 2/14 and 3/22. (Map 16)

The operation began at 0700 hours on 6 May with 16 tactical air sorties against the target areas. Two 15,000 lb. bombs were used to clear landing zones for the heliborne assaults. An element of the 3/22 Infantry was first inserted in an area west of the Ben Go River; next, the 1/5 Infantry (Mechanized) advanced toward the southwest, followed by engineer elements of the 65th Engineer Battalion, 25th Infantry Division, which were to install a river-crossing facility for mechanized units. While work on the pontoon bridge was in progress, three companies of the 3/22 Infantry were helilifted into an area

in the northwest, linking up with a company which had been inserted there. Meanwhile, observation planes and gunships of the U.S. 3/17 Air Cavalry flew cover missions west of the target area. After the completion of the bridge on the Ben Go River, the 1/5 and 2/22 Infantry (Mechanized) crossed over and attacked in two directions: west and south.

On 7 May, elements of the 2/14 Infantry engaged the enemy heavily four km south of the Ben Go River, deep in Cambodian territory, killing 167 troops and capturing 28 assorted weapons. The battalion also uncovered a cache containing about 33 tons of rice. After the objectives had been occupied, friendly forces continued to search for enemy supply points.

On 11 May, 22 Km west of the border, U.S. forces discovered an important enemy supply storage area and captured a total of 200 assorted weapons, 3,000 lbs. of rice, 1,600 lbs. of salt and 90 VC uniforms. This operation was terminated on 14 May and, beginning on 15 May, the 1st Brigade, 25th Infantry Division was deployed to the Fishhook area where it took over from forces of the U.S. 1st Air Cavalry Division.

#### TOAN THANG 45

On 6 May 1970, the U.S. 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) initiated a second cross-border operation, striking against enemy Base Area 351 which was located in Cambodia, northwest of Bu Dop, Phuoc Long Province. (Map 16)

Two battalions of the 2d Brigade, U.S. 1st Cavalry Division conducted a heliborne assault into the heart of the enemy base area but only made scattered contact with small enemy elements. The next morning, after the enemy broke contact, U.S. forces discovered an important enemy weapon cache in the "Rock Island East" area. The quantities of weapons and ammunition found were so large that it was decided to build a pioneer road linking Base Area 351 with Route No. 14 to facilitate their transportation. It was estimated that without this road, it would take our helicopters several days and



many hours of flying time to accomplish this requirement.

On 11 May, the remaining battalion of the 2d Brigade, U.S. 1st Cavalry Division was helilifted into the area north of Ba Gia Map. In the meantime, air cavalry and gunships conducted patrol missions to the north in order to detect and interdict isolated enemy convoys.

On 12 May, a reinforcement unit, the 5/12 Infantry of the U.S. 199th Brigade was brought in to take over the positions of the 5/7 Air Cavalry. During its very first night on Cambodian soil, this Battalion was shelled and attacked. It suffered one killed and four wounded; but 50 enemy were killed during this engagement. On 20 May, the 1st Cavalry Division helilifted one additional battalion into the area of O'Rang. This brought the U.S. force committed in this area of operation to a total of eight battalions.

To make the search for enemy supply caches more effective, the 1st Cavalry Division enlisted the services of those FANK troops who had previously assisted in moving cargo from the port of Sihanoukville to NVA border base areas by road. These same Khmer troops now served as guides for U.S. reconnaissance patrols to help pinpoint the locations of enemy caches.

May 29 was a day of increased activity. Almost every unit in the area of operation reported contact with the enemy and the discovery of additional weapons and supply caches. On 5 June, the last battalion of the U.S. 1st Cavalry Division was brought in; the division was now operating at full combat strength. During the day, U.S. forces discovered an enemy hospital complex with surgical facilities northwest of Bu Dop. Air Cavalry elements also sighted a vehicle park with five 2½-ton trucks and a maintenance shop, well equipped with truck accessories.

During the second week of June, units of the 3d Air Cavalry Brigade unearthed an underground shelter containing signal communications equipment and a shop facility with parts and accessories 18 km northwest of Bu Dop. According to enemy documents seized in the area of operation, this signal depot belonged to COSVN headquarters. By the 3d week of June, enemy-initiated activities had increased in

the area of operation. Most of these activities were attacks-by-fire conducted during the morning to harass U.S. forces.

The U.S. 1st Cavalry Division began withdrawing its forces from Cambodia on 20 June. One after another, U.S. battalion headquarters and fire support bases were dismantled and returned to South Vietnam. By 27 June, the last firebase of the division had been removed from Cambodia. During this redeployment period, extensive B-52 strikes were used to destroy enemy forces and prevent them from following in pursuit. The last U.S. unit terminated its activities in Cambodia and returned to South Vietnam on 29 June.

#### TOAN THANG 46

On 6 May 1970, simultaneously with the initiation of TOAN THANG 45 by U.S. forces, the 9th Regiment, ARVN 5th Infantry Division launched operation TOAN THANG 46 against enemy Base Area 350. (Map 16) Two battalions of the 9th Regiment were inserted into the target area by U.S. helicopters. During the first few days, contacts with the enemy were scattered but at every contact point, our forces invariably discovered an enemy cache containing either foodstuff or weapons and ammunition. To reinforce this operational force, the 1st Armored Cavalry Squadron was brought into the area of operation on 11 May.

During the day of 21 May, both ARVN battalions were heavily engaged by the enemy. However, they received effective support from U.S. tactical air and gunships. After the dust of the battle had settled, our forces discovered an enemy hospital complex capable of providing medical treatment for 500 men. This hospital was equipped with surgical facilities and had adequate supplies of medicine. On 26 May, after completing the search of the southern part of Base Area 350, ARVN forces shifted their effort northward. Here they met heavier enemy resistance and were harassed almost nightly with attacks-by-fire.

During the last two weeks of the operation, the 9th Regiment discovered additional enemy supply caches, mostly weapons and ammunition. By mid-June, enemy activity had increased significantly

but was conducted mostly against isolated ARVN elements. To improve security, the 9th Regiment upgraded patrol activities to company size; our forces also inflicted heavier losses on the enemy. As of 20 June, however, the 9th Regiment and the 1st Armored Cavalry Squadron began to reduce their area of operation and fell back to near the border in the vicinity of Route No. 13. This action paralleled the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Cambodia which was also initiated on that day. Along their withdrawal route, ARVN forces made several contacts with the enemy and also discovered additional enemy supply caches. By the evening of 27 June, our forces were already in night-defense positions on the RVN side of the border. The 9th Regiment continued operating in this border area until 30 June when it was returned to its rear base at Chon Thanh.

The following is a recapitulation of the results obtained during the operations conducted by United States and RVN forces against the Fishhook and Base Areas 350, 351, 352, 353, 354 and 707:

TOAN THANG 42:	3,588 enemy killed or captured. 1,891 individual weapons, 478 crew-served weapons, 380.6 tons of ammunition, 1,041.6 tons of rice seized.
TOAN THANG 43:	3,190 enemy killed or captured. 4,693 individual weapons, 731 crew-served weapons, 338.4 tons of ammunition, 2,698 tons of rice seized.
TOAN THANG 44:	302 enemy killed or captured. 297 individual and 34 crew-served weapons, 4 tons of ammunition and 217 tons of rice seized.
TOAN THANG 45:	1,527 enemy killed or captured. 3,073 individual and 449 crew-served weapons, 791 tons of ammunition, and 1,583 tons of rice seized.
TOAN THANG 46:	79 enemy killed or captured. 325 individual and 41 crew-served weapons, 19.7 tons of ammunition and 79 tons of rice seized.

See Appendix A for a listing of all enemy losses during the Cambodian Incursion.

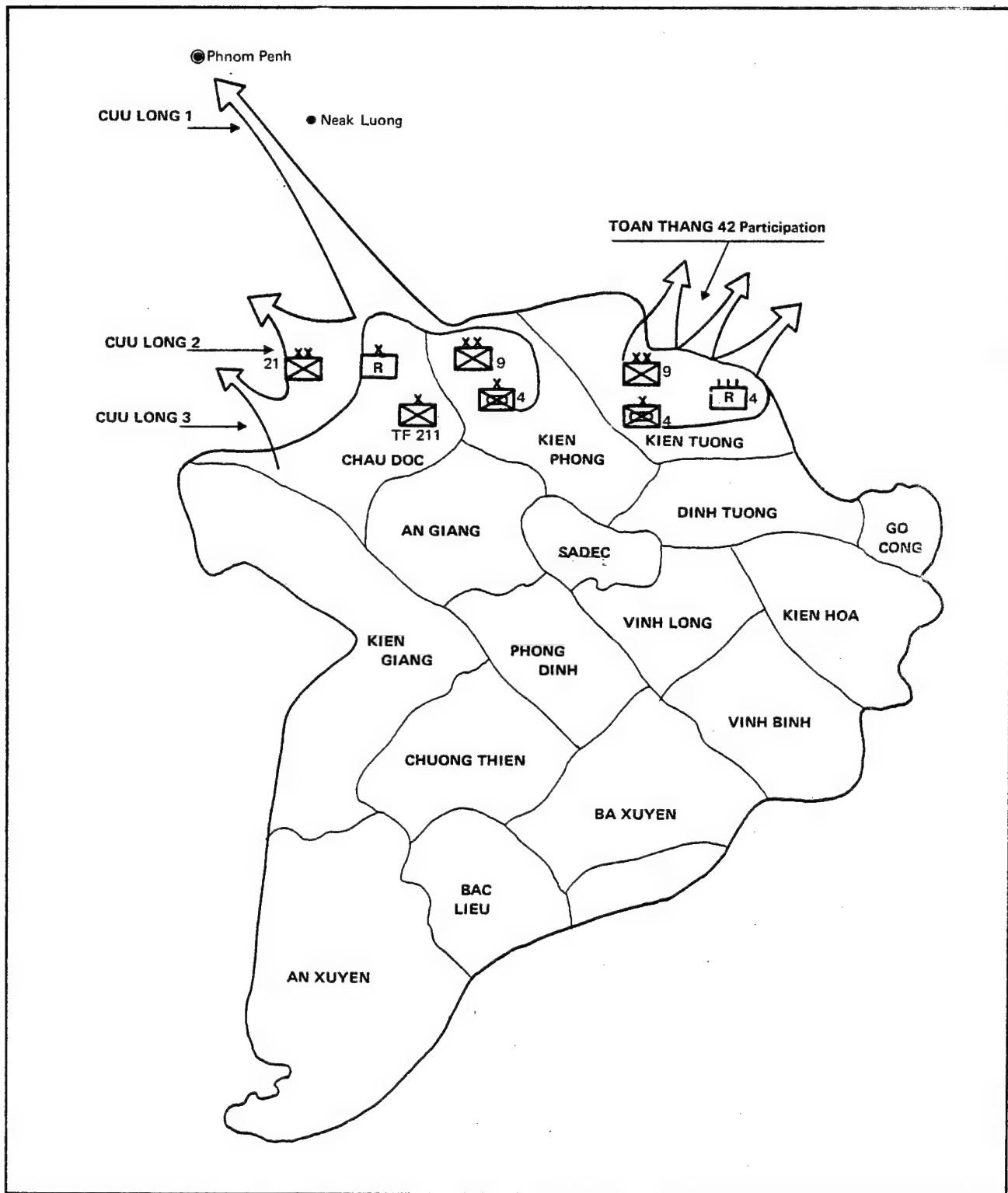
The quantities of weapons, ammunition and rice seized in these areas indicated that they were important enemy rear service bases. Most captured crates bore the markings of Communist bloc countries; these items were new and still wrapped in original packings. In particular, weapon and ammunition caches were found in deep underground shelters, well camouflaged and located in dense jungles. All accesses to these supply caches were mined and rigged with booby traps. Most of our casualties were caused by these mines and booby traps.

### *Clearing the Mekong and Repatriating Vietnamese*

The IV Corps Commander was given the mission to clear the Mekong as far as Phnom Penh, and to repatriate the Vietnamese who were in refugee camps in the Cambodian capital. This operation was designated CUU LONG I. (*Map 18*)

After their unsuccessful efforts to lay siege to and harass Cambodian cities and outposts east of the Mekong River, NVA forces evaded U.S. and RVN forces operating in this area and shifted their pressure to the west. They began to interdict and attack all vital roads and waterways connecting Phnom Penh with provincial cities to the south and west of the capital. Routes No. 2 and 3, which led toward Phnom Penh from the south, were frequently interdicted by Khmer Communist elements. The enemy's interdiction and disruptive efforts were even more extensive on the Mekong River. Traffic moving on the river was constantly attacked and the ferry boats at Neak Luong, which provided a key east-west traffic junction on Route No. 1, had been towed away by the enemy. Both Route No. 1 and the Mekong River toward Phnom Penh were therefore cut off, which effectively isolated this capital city from its normal sources of supply. In Phnom Penh, food and fuel, especially gasoline for automobiles and industrial plants, were beginning to get scarce. Food reserves in the city were just enough for two or three weeks of supply. Meanwhile, refugees kept pouring into the city in

Map 18 - General Locations for CUU LONG 1, 2, 3, and IV Corps  
Participation in TOAN THANG 42



increasing numbers as the fighting expanded, and the enemy tightened his pressure on the city and its surroundings.

In response to an appeal by the Khmer government which specifically asked for the clearing of the Mekong River and axes of communication to the south by the RVNAF, IV Corps launched Operation CUU LONG I. In addition to its primary objective of clearing the Mekong River, this operation was also intended to repatriate Vietnamese residents in Phnom Penh. The GVN was aware that from 60,000 to 75,000 Vietnamese were being confined to camps and they wished to return to South Vietnam. In late April 1970, a GVN delegation led by Dr. Tran Nguon Phieu had gone to Phnom Penh to make arrangements with the Cambodian Government for the repatriation of Vietnamese residents.

CUU LONG I began 9 May 1970 when IV Corps forces, which consisted of the 9th Infantry Division, the 21st Infantry Division (-) and five armored cavalry squadrons, reinforced by Amphibious Task Force 211 (composed of 1 Marine brigade and about 30 VNN ships) crossed the border and moved inside Cambodia on several axes. Two major ARVN armor-infantry columns moved up the Mekong River on both of its banks while six helicopter companies of the U.S. Cougar Task Force heli-lifted the marines and rangers to an area south of Neak Luong. On the Mekong River itself, a combined U.S. - RVN naval task force of approximately 100 assorted ships (30 U.S. naval ships among them) advanced toward Phnom Penh. This combined naval task force was placed under the overall command of Rear Admiral Tran Van Chon, Vietnam Navy Commander. He was assisted by Rear Admiral Mathew who commanded the U.S. naval component of the task force. A combined VNN-U.S. Navy staff was installed onboard a command ship, the USS Benewah, anchored at Tan Chau on the RVN side of the border.

After two days of operation, the IV Corps ground forces had reached Neak Luong, clearing both banks of the Mekong River from the border. They were joined there at 0530 hours on 11 May by the combined naval task force. All U.S. naval advisers and naval ships were to stay at Neak Luong because they were not authorized to advance beyond

30 km inside Cambodia. While on station at Neak Luong, VNN and U.S. Navy units conducted an extensive civic action program, providing medical care for both Cambodians and Vietnamese living in this area. In the meantime, IV Corps armor-infantry forces and the VNN task force (minus U.S. advisers) continued their clearing operation in the direction of Phnom Penh where they arrived at 1000 hours on 11 May. The arrival of the Vietnamese naval task force and ground troops brought welcoming cheers from the local Khmer population. This was in fact one of the greatest shows of force ever displayed by the VNN, which was intended both to impress the FANK and raise the morale of local Vietnamese residents. Rumors had been spread that many Vietnamese residents were assassinated by Khmer soldiers and it was hoped that this show of force would deter these soldiers from wrong doing. On their part, the Vietnamese residents in Phnom Penh also found their fear effectively allayed by the presence of Vietnamese naval ships.

After the arrival in Phnom Penh of the RVN naval task force, which numbered about 30 ships, the VNN received a request from the FANK General Staff to help clear the waterway route from Phnom Penh to Kompong Cham. Kompong Cham was the third most important Cambodian city and the seat of the Khmer 1st Military Region Headquarters. This city had been surrounded by NVA forces of the 9th Division and shelled for the past 10 days. Because of the NVA siege, the FANK garrison in Kompong Cham was unable to evacuate its wounded and was running short of ammunition.

Responding to the FANK General Staff's request, the VNN task force continued its clearing operation up the Mekong River and reached Kompong Cham at 0600 hours on 12 May. In this city there were about 9,000 Vietnamese residents already assembled, all requesting return to South Vietnam. They embarked on the VNN ships which moved out of Kompong Cham at 0100 hours and arrived at Phnom Penh at 1900 hours on 12 May. The naval convoy, with Vietnamese residents aboard, then continued its journey home, leaving Phnom Penh at 0400 hours on 13 May, and reached the border at 1800 hours the same day. The

Vietnamese repatriates were subsequently transported to An Long, Cao Lanh, Hong Ngu and Thanh Binh in Chau Doc and Kien Phong Provinces where local GVN authorities helped them resettle.

Simultaneously with the IV Corps and VNN efforts to clear the Mekong River and repatriate Vietnamese residents, III Corps forces also succeeded in clearing Route No. 1 from the RVN border (Go Dau Ha) to Neak Luong. In the morning of 14 May, Task Force 318 of III Corps effectively linked up with IV Corps forces at a point east of Prey Veng. As a result, the two key Cambodian supply routes - the Mekong River and Route No. 1 - had been cleared by the RVNAF beginning on 14 May. This effectively made way for all those Vietnamese residents in Cambodia who wished to return to South Vietnam. Now they were able to move freely and safely since both routes had been secured by RVNAF troops.

To speed up the repatriation process, on 14 May, the VNN brought in an additional 21 ships, which arrived in Phnom Penh at 0600 hours on 15 May. On 17 May, the second naval convoy with 6,000 Vietnamese residents aboard left Phnom Penh and reached Dinh Tuong Province during the night of 18 May. By these two convoys, the VNN had brought home a total of 17,300 repatriates from Phnom Penh.

After having cleared the Mekong River and Route No. 1, the RVNAF were authorized by the Khmer government to maintain a permanent force at Neak Luong, made up of ARVN and VNN units. The mission of this joint task force was to continue providing protection for the Mekong River and to be prepared to relieve Phnom Penh as required. During the initial stage, the RVNAF maintained three marine battalions and two river groups (71 and 72) at Neak Luong which also became in time an important supply base for ARVN forces operating in Cambodia. ARVN engineers also built a short airstrip there for observation and Caribou cargo planes and repaired the loading ramp on the Mekong to accommodate two LST's simultaneously.

Despite its success, Operation CUU LONG I was marred by the accidental death of Major General Nguyen Viet Thanh, IV Corps Commander, who had effectively directed the operation during its



initial stage. On 12 May 1970, while on a field inspection trip over the areas of Kiên Tuong and Kien Phong, his helicopter collided with a gunship and crashed. His death occurred while the clearing operation on the Mekong River was still unaccomplished. He was replaced by Major General Ngo Dzu.

### *CUU LONG II AND III*

CUU LONG II and III were conducted in support of Khmer Military Region II. (*Map 18*)

#### CUU LONG II

Takeo is an important Cambodian city located 40 km south of Phnom Penh. Beginning in early May 1970, the enemy overran outposts along Routes No. 2 and 3 and forced the evacuation of others. Concurrently, pressure was increasing on Takeo and this city found its road accesses to the south effectively interdicted. Also during this period Takeo was shelled frequently, even during daytime.

(*Map 18*)

After learning the assignment of Major General Ngo Dzu as IV Corps Commander in replacement of Major General Nguyen Viet Thanh, Brigadier General Fernandez, Commander Khmer Military Region II at Kompong Speu, contacted him personally and asked him to help clear NVA forces from around Takeo. Dzu was a former classmate of Fernandez; both attended the General Staff course in France during 1953. Dzu submitted it to the JGS which quickly gave its approval. As a result, on 16 May, 1970, IV Corps initiated Operation CUU LONG II while the evacuation of Vietnamese residents from Phnom Penh was still in progress as part of CUU LONG I. The objective of this second operation was to assist the Khmer Government in restoring security around Takeo and re-establishing local governments in the area extending from Kampot to the Bassac River, to include the provincial territories of Kampot,

Tuk Meas, Phum Kamphong, Takeo and Prek Thei. ARVN forces participating in the operation consisted of the 9th and 21st Infantry Divisions, the 4th Armor Brigade, the 4th Ranger Group (with 3 battalions), the Special Forces Command of MR-4 and the entire territorial force of Chau Doc Province. IV Corps established its forward command post at Chi Lang Training Center to facilitate coordination and control.

After one week of operation, IV Corps forces had completely cleared both routes No. 2 and No. 3. For the first time, VNAF helicopters were used to helilift Khmer troops in combined operations with IV Corps units south of Takeo. In total, IV Corps units made 21 contacts with the enemy, discovered 26 enemy supply caches, seized 792 individual and 84 crew-served weapons, and destroyed 43 tons of rice. Enemy losses amounted to 613 killed, 52 captured and 9 ralliers. Our forces suffered 36 killed and 112 wounded. CUU LONG II was terminated on 24 May at 1600 hours.

### CUU LONG III

Concurrently as it was terminating CUU LONG II, IV Corps launched another operation, CUU LONG III, in the same general area but without the 21st Division which was redeployed to South Vietnam. The 9th Division thus extended its area of operation to include the one vacated by the 21st. All other ARVN forces remained the same. (Map 18)

From 25 May to 30 June 1970, IV Corps forces combined their activities with those of the Khmer Military Region II, reestablishing local governments in the areas of Kompong Trach, Tuk Meas, Tani, Kompong Chrey and Tunleap. During this period, the enemy deliberately avoided contact with our forces. The most remarkable exploit was achieved by the 16th Regiment, 9th Division and 12th Armored Cavalry Squadron which recovered 3,500 weapons in storage that NVA forces had not had time to seize when they launched their attack in this area.

At certain times during the cross-border operations, up to 3/4 of IV Corps forces were committed in Cambodia. The security situation in the Mekong Delta was not affected, however; it was well handled by RF and PF troops. This in itself was a remarkable achievement.

Another significant aspect of the Cambodian incursions by IV Corps forces was the participation of 30 U.S. naval ships during CUU LONG I. These U.S. ships had made a major contribution in the evacuation of 70,000 Vietnamese residents from Cambodia.

### *BINH TAY I, II and III*

The principal forces involved in the BINH TAY series of operations were the ARVN 22d and 23d Infantry Divisions, the 2d Ranger Group, and the 2d Armor Brigade. The United States provided the 4th Infantry Division, less one brigade. (*Map 19*)

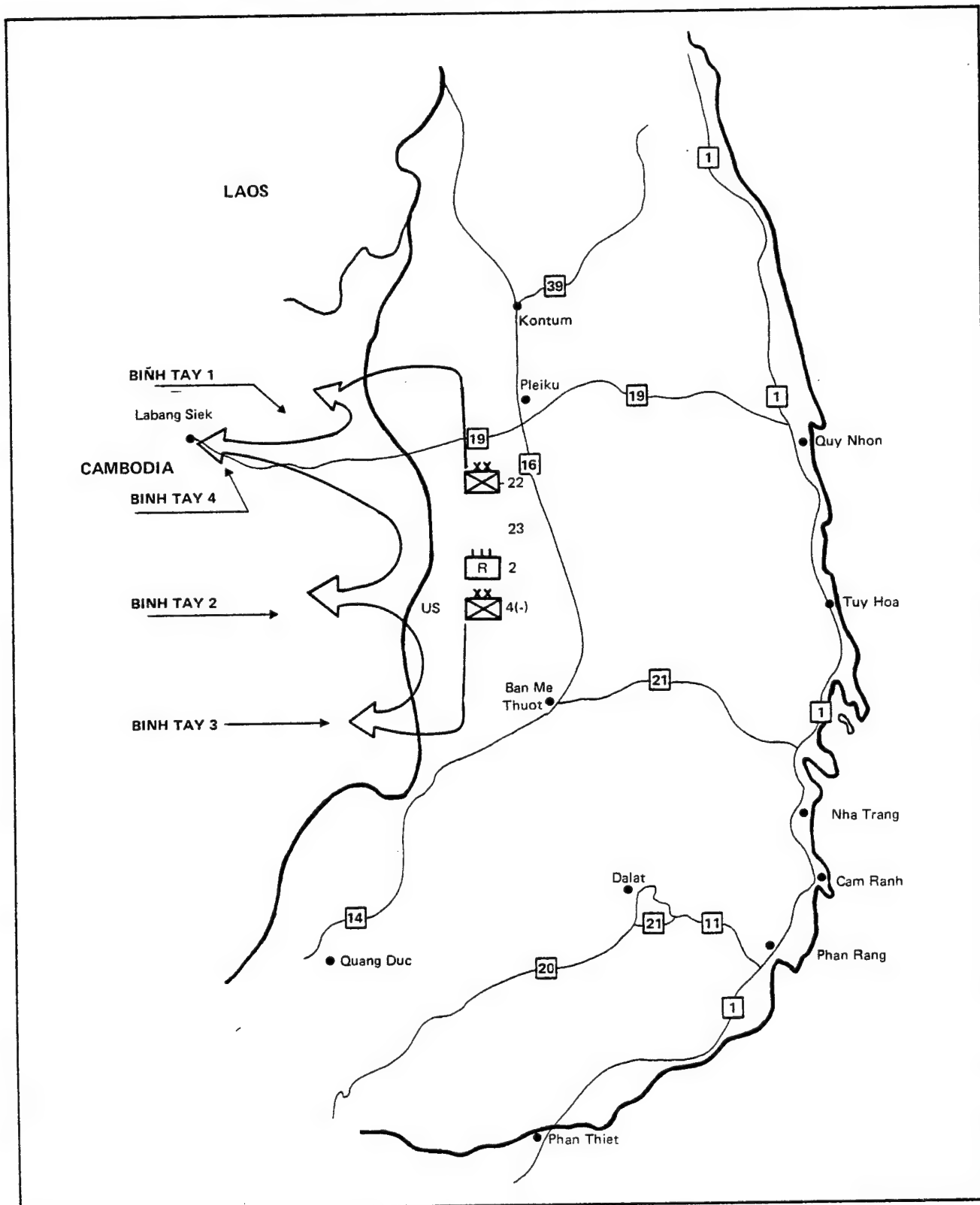
#### BINH TAY I

Not until two days after III Corps and the U.S. Field Force II had begun their cross-border operations into Cambodia did II Corps and the U.S. Field Force I receive orders to attack enemy base areas along the western border of MR-2. (*Map 20*) When these orders were received on 2 May 1970, units of the U.S. 4th Infantry Division and the ARVN 22d Infantry Division were conducting operations in enemy Base Area 226 northwest of Binh Dinh Province.

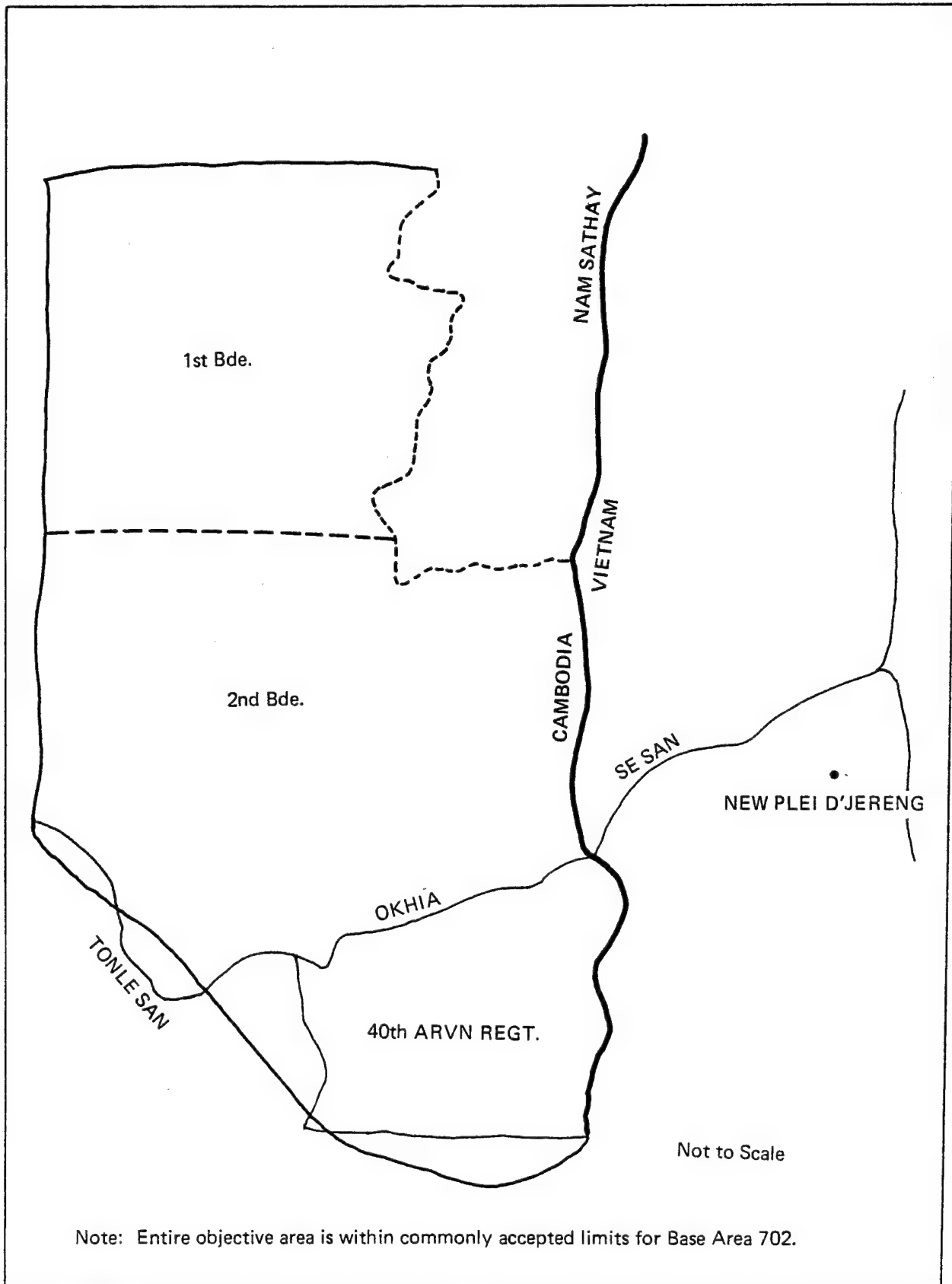
To carry out the JGS and MACV orders, II Corps and the U.S. Field Force I quickly extracted the 22d ARVN Division and U.S. 4th Division forces from their areas of operation to refit and resupply. They were moved to staging areas to prepare for cross-border activities.

While the U.S. 4th Division units were being extracted from Base Area 226, the division staff and its ARVN counterpart of the 22d Division made plans to attack and destroy enemy Base Area 702 located in Cambodia west of Pleiku. This was the first objective selected for our combined operations across the long border of Military Region 2. When plans were completed, the participating units of the U.S. 4th Division and the 40th Regiment, 22d Division, were moved on 4 May to a staging area near Special Forces Camp New Plei D' Jereng west of Pleiku. However, one element of the U.S.

Map 19 - General Locations of BINH TAY 1, 2, 3 and 4



Map 20 - Objective Area for Operation BINH TAY 1



2d Brigade did not close in its staging area south of Plei D' Jereng until the morning of 6 May.

The 1st Brigade, U.S. 4th Division, which had preceded the 2d into the staging area, began helilifting the 3/506 Infantry into the objective area on 5 May as planned. At 0915 hours, the first helicopter carrying troops of this battalion failed to land because of heavy enemy caliber .50 fire from the ground. The heliborne assault was aborted and the 3/506 Infantry returned to Plei D'Jereng. By this time, the weather had turned bad and because fuel supply points for the helicopter fleet had not been fully operational, the heliborne assault was postponed until the next day.

During the morning of 6 May, the 1st Brigade, U.S. 4th Division, resumed the insertion of its troops into the objective area as planned. Despite intensive preparatory fire by U.S. tactical air on the landing zone, enemy antiaircraft fire was still very heavy from the ground and prevented the 3/8 Infantry from landing. On orders from the battalion commander, the helicopters switched to an alternate landing zone. However, after only 60 troops had landed, one helicopter was hit and crashed in the landing zone; two others were seriously damaged when they attempted to land. U.S. tactical air and gunships made feverish effort to silence enemy antiaircraft fire and enabled medevac helicopters to extract the wounded. By late afternoon, only 60 troops of the 3/8 Infantry were in the landing zone. The 1/14 Infantry, however, had succeeded in landing 75% of its troops.

By 7 May, the entire force of the 1st Brigade, U.S. 4th Division, was inserted into the objective area, followed by its sister unit, the 2d Brigade. As the troops landed, 105 mm howitzers were also brought in to provide close fire support. Heavier artillery pieces such as 8" howitzers and 175 mm guns were only deployed on the RVN side of the border, along Routes Nos. 19W and 509, during the entire operation.

On 9 May, the 3/506 Infantry uncovered a rice depot containing about 500 tons. On 11 May, elements of the 2/14 Infantry discovered an enemy dispensary complete with surgical equipment and medicine and

the 3/8 Infantry found another 20-bed hospital. The next day, 12 May 1970, the 2d Brigade was ordered to redeploy to South Vietnam; it left the 1/12 Infantry in the area of operation which was placed under the 1st Brigade's operational control. On 13 May, two battalions of the 2d Brigade, the 1/22 and 2/35 were helilifted back to Radcliff Base at An Khe. Here, they stood down, pending redeployment to the United States. After the 2d Brigade (-) had completed its redeployment, the 1st Brigade (+) in its turn also received orders to move out of Base Area 702. This area of operation was to be taken over by the 2d ARVN Ranger Group of II Corps. On 15 May, the 1/12 Infantry was helilifted out of the area of operation to Camp New Plei D' Jereng. From there, it moved by truck back to An Khe during the morning of 16 May. On the same day, the 3/8 and 3/506 Infantry were also extracted and returned to South Vietnam.

In the meantime, units of the 40th Regiment, 22d Division and the 2d Ranger Group, continued search operations in Base Area 702. To support ARVN activities in Cambodia, the U.S. 3/8 and 3/506 Infantry after their extraction from the area of operation, resumed their activities on the RVN side of the border and established a fire support base in the Plei Trap area.

Operation BINH TAY I was terminated on 25 May 1970. A tally of results provided the following statistics. On the friendly side, 43 were killed and 118 wounded. The enemy incurred 212 killed and 7 detained. Our forces seized 20 crew-served and 859 individual weapons. They also confiscated or destroyed 519 tons of rice and burned down 2,157 huts and other surface installations used by the enemy.

The area of operation or Base Area 702 was adjacent to the Tri-Border area, a haven for the enemy B-3 Front units since 1965. Within Base Area 702, which was located in Cambodia, there were also certain B-3 Front elements such as liaison and communication way stations and binh trams where enemy main force units usually rested and recuperated. As of the beginning of May 1970, however, no enemy main force units were reported in Base Area 702. According to intelligence reports, there were about 1,000 enemy troops in the area

of operation prior to the initiation of BINH TAY I. However, except for the antiaircraft activity during our heliborne assaults, the enemy deliberately avoided contact throughout the operation. Given the large extent of the objective area and the limited duration of the operation, our forces were unable to destroy all enemy installations and supply caches as originally intended. The absence of enemy contact and the scarcity of supply caches uncovered could be explained by enemy documents captured on 8 May in the area of operation. According to these documents, the enemy had anticipated that U.S. and ARVN operations would probably be launched into Cambodia after Sihanouk was deposed as Chief of State, and after Lon Nol had issued an ultimatum giving the VC/NVA until 15 March to vacate Cambodia. Among these documents, there was a typewritten directive issued by the B-3 Front Headquarters on 17 March 1970 and addressed to its subordinate units. The text of the directive read as follows:

Information that we have collected indicates that the enemy (US-RVN forces) will probably launch operations into our area. As a result, all of our bases and supply points will be concealed and camouflaged to prevent their discovery by the enemy. Documents and records should be carefully packed and ready to be moved at any moment. All of our installations, to include hospitals and dispensaries should be safeguarded and patrols should be extensive enough to provide early detection of enemy penetrations. All of our positions should be kept secret and radio communications severely restricted. Troops are forbidden to fire their weapons in hunting and to fish by detonating grenades in the Ta Bop River. Cadres of all echelons will educate their subordinates to strictly carry out these orders. In no instances should they let themselves or their weapons and documents be captured by the enemy. When facing enemy forces, they should attempt to break away and avoid shooting back. Our purpose is to conserve forces as much as we can.

#### BINH TAY II

II Corps initiated BINH TAY II on 14 May 1970, against Base Area 701 and B-3 Front units such as the 24th, 28th or 66th Regiments and the 40th Artillery Regiment. Historically, these units would displace toward this base area and from there launch



attacks against our border camps in Darlac and Pleiku Provinces.

(Map 19)

According to II Corps plans, the 22d Infantry Division was assigned to carry out this task. After the landing zones had been extensively bombarded by U.S. tactical air, two regiments of the 22d Division, the 40th and 47th, were inserted by U.S. helicopters into the north of Base Area 701. At the same time, the 3d Armored Cavalry Squadron and reconnaissance elements of the 22d Division also crossed the border and attacked from the south in order to link up with the two infantry regiments in the north. Meanwhile, a U.S. air cavalry unit conducted patrols to the west to interdict all enemy evasive efforts.

As soon as they landed, troops of the 40th Regiment discovered an enemy ammunition cache containing about two tons of 82 mm mortar rounds and B-40 rockets. Continuing their push southward, ARVN infantry elements discovered two additional enemy caches on 17 May from which they seized 100 AK-47 rifles, 6 crew-served weapons, 10,000 lbs. of rice and 660 kilos of peanuts. On 18 May, elements of the 47th Regiment again found an enemy supply cache and seized 159 assorted weapons. Extending their search, our troops discovered an enemy dispensary where they seized 2,000 lbs. of medicine and some surgical equipment still in original packings. The next day, 19 May, all elements of the 47th Regiment reported contact with the enemy. When the fighting abated, friendly forces discovered 2 enemy caches and seized 87 individual weapons and 17 crew-served weapons, including 7 Chicom flame throwers. On the friendly side, one was killed and four wounded.

By 24 May, the entire enemy base area had been thoroughly searched by our forces and the operation was considered successfully accomplished. On 25 May, the 3d Armored Cavalry Squadron and the 40th Regiment began withdrawing from the area of operation and they were assembled at Border Camp Thang Duc in Military Region 2 during the morning of 26 May. The 47th Regiment soon followed and was back in Military Region 2 in the morning of 27 May when the operation was officially terminated.

During their two-week foray into Base Area 701, ARVN forces made scattered contact only with enemy elements guarding supply installations or with guerrillas. No contact was ever made with any of the enemy's major force units which in all probability had displaced deep inside Cambodia to conserve their forces. Despite this, our forces managed to kill 73 enemy and detain 6 others.

### BINH TAY III

This operation was conducted by the ARVN 23d Infantry Division and consisted of three phases. Phase 1, from 20 May to 3 June 1970, and phase 2, from 4 to 12 June 1970, were intended to destroy enemy Base Area 740 which was located in Cambodia west of Quang Duc and Darlac Provinces (*Map 19*)

Within Base Area 740, our intelligence reports indicated the presence of the 251st Transportation Battalion, the K-394 Artillery Battalion (-) and possibly some elements of the NVA 33d Regiment. An enemy document captured on 10 May 1970 by CIDG troops had revealed the presence of this regiment in the area. In addition to these units, the enemy document also indicated that this was an active area of transit for NVA transportation groups and COSVN rear service units. In the northern part of this base area, our intelligence reported the presence of the 301st Logistic Unit and the 401st Sapper Battalion of Darlac Province. This area was used by the enemy as a way-station for transportation or infiltration groups en route between Base Areas 701 and 740.

The 23d Division organized its units into armor-infantry task forces. For Phase 1 of the operation (20 May to 3 June 1970), there were two task forces:

#### Task Force 8:

- Headquarters, 8th Armored Cavalry Squadron;
- 1st, 2d, 3d Troops, 8th ACS;
- 3d Battalion, 44th Infantry Regiment;
- 413th Montagnard Strike Force;
- C Company, 23d Engineer Battalion.

Task Force 45:

Headquarters, 45th Infantry Regiment;  
1st, 3d, and 4th Battalions, 45th Regiment;  
45th and 53d Reconnaissance Companies.

In Phase 2 (from 4 to 12 June 1970), the task forces were reorganized as follows:

Task Force 8:

Headquarters, 8th Armored Cavalry Squadron;  
1st, 2d and 3d Troops, 8th ACS;  
412th and 413th Montagnard Strike Forces.

Task Force 44:

Headquarters, 44th Regiment;  
1st and 3d Battalions, 44th Regiment and 3d Battalion, 53d Rgt;  
53d Reconnaissance Company;  
C Company, 23d Combat Engineer Battalion.

Task Force 45:

Headquarters, 45th Regiment;  
1st, 3d and 4th Battalions, 45th Regiment;  
45th Reconnaissance Company.

On 20 May 1970, Task Forces 8 and 45 initiated operations against Base Area 740. TF 45 was inserted by U.S. helicopters into the northern part of the base area while TF 8 advanced toward the southern part. Meanwhile, elements of the 7/17 U.S. Air Cavalry Battalion conducted interdiction patrols over the west and north of the objective area and CIDG units operated along the border to block enemy evasions into Military Region 2. From the RVN side of the border, 8" and 175-mm U.S. artillery units provided firepower support for ARVN forces in the objective area.

The heliborne assault by TF 45 was accomplished as planned despite bad weather, but met with no enemy resistance. TF 8, which was moving into the roughest terrain, had to change its axis of progress several times. During the first day, our forces made only sporadic contact with the enemy but found several enemy caches containing rice and medicine. While advancing toward the objective and searching for enemy caches, our forces met with several columns of refugees

moving out of the area toward South Vietnam. The most remarkable exploit by our forces in this base area was the destruction of a 10-truck convoy by U.S. gunships and another 4 trucks by ARVN infantry units. ARVN forces also seized two 1/4-ton trucks left behind by the enemy.

During the entire duration of the operation in this enemy base area, our forces made 34 contacts of squad and company size with the enemy. These contacts were scattered and took place mostly during the first few days. The enemy opened fire only when our units happened to be in the vicinity of his supply caches. It was usually impossible for our forces to determine in these instances the designation or size of the enemy force encountered because of our habit to call for artillery or airstrikes whenever contact was made. During Phase 1 of the operation, our forces discovered several enemy food caches and seized an important quantity of weapons. All of the weapons and rice was hauled back to South Vietnam by U.S. helicopters. In all probability, those enemy elements which came into contact with our forces in the objective area were part of logistic or rear service units responsible for the security of installations and supply points. Apparently, the enemy's main force units had withdrawn farther into Cambodia prior to our operation. During Phase 1, our forces suffered 29 killed and 77 wounded while inflicting on the enemy 96 killed, 1 detained and 1 rallier.

Phase 1 ended on 3 June as Task Force 8 withdrew from the area of operations but continued security of Route No. 14 from Duc Lap to Bu Prang. Phase 2 began on 4 June. While Task Force 45 continued search activities in the area of the Nam Lyr mountain range, Task Force 44 (-) was inserted north of TF 45 and the U.S. 21st Cavalry continued its patrols west and northwest of the area of operation. On 9 June, U.S. air cavalry elements detected an enemy company-size unit on the move. Tactical air and gunships swarmed over and inflicted serious losses on the enemy unit as evidenced by

observation from the air. Rough terrain, however, prevented our 44th Regiment from going in to verify the results; the operation was then temporarily suspended on 12 June 1970.

After one week of refitting and recuperation, the 23d Division initiated Phase 3 of the operation. During this phase, all three task forces, the 8th, 44th, and 45th were committed. On 19 June, TF 44 and 45 made heliborne assaults into an area sandwiched between Base Area 201 and 740. Two fire support bases were established, one in Cambodia for the support of TF 45 and the other in the RVN for the support of TF 44. Throughout the nine days of Phase 3, ARVN forces only made sporadic contact with the enemy but discovered an important enemy supply cache. Both task forces were extracted from Cambodia to Ban Don on 27 June. From Ban Don, they moved by trucks back to Ban Me Thuot where the last element arrived at 1630 hours the same day.

Friendly casualties during Phase 3 were light as compared to the enemy's and in proportion to the size of forces committed and the duration of the operation. Our forces suffered 38 killed, 113 wounded, and 2 missing while inflicting on the enemy 149 killed, 2 detained and 1 rallier. Our losses thus amounted to only one-fourth of the enemy's. In addition, our forces seized 581 individual and 85 crew-served weapons and 447 tons of rice. Another 81 tons of rice were destroyed on the spot. Most weapons captured in this area were either rusty or in bad condition; the more serviceable weapons had probably been removed prior to the operation.

This was the first division-size operation ever conducted by the 23rd Infantry Division. As compared to the other ten ARVN divisions, the 23rd had only modest capabilities in terms of combat effectiveness and overall performance.

#### *The Evacuation of Khmer Forces from Ratanakiri Province*

As a result of the spreading war and the enemy's pressure on Phnom Penh, the Cambodian government found it imperative to conserve its meager military forces by restricting them to the defense of

populous and resource-rich areas. The FANK maintained two isolated military bases in Ratanakiri Province Cambodia - Ba Kev and Labang Siek - which were not only difficult to defend but also absorbed substantial forces which were more needed for the defense of Phnom Penh. Unable to evacuate these bases by themselves, the FANK asked the RVN and U.S. for help. After discussing the evacuation of Ba Kev and Labang Siek with a FANK mission in Saigon, the JGS and MACV decided to turn this task over to II Corps and U.S. Field Force I. The operation was designated BINH TAY IV. (Map 21)

On 21 June 1970, II Corps assigned to the 22d Division the task of evacuating all equipment, materials, vehicles, weapons and military dependents from these two Cambodian bases. For the accomplishment of this task, the 22d Division was reinforced with armor, ranger and engineer units. Support assets were to be provided by the U.S. Field Force I, but only to the extent that it was authorized; in other words, U.S. assets were not to be committed beyond the 30-km limit from the RVN border.

To carry out its mission, the 22d Division organized its units into 4 task forces:

Task Force 214:

- 14th Armored Cavalry Squadron;
- 23d Ranger Battalion;
- 1 Engineer Platoon, 22d Combat Engineer Battalion;
- 1 105-mm battery (-) of four pieces.

Task Force 247:

- 47th Infantry Regiment (2 battalions);
- 1 engineer platoon, 22d Combat Engineer Battalion;
- 1 mixed 105-mm/155-mm battery of six pieces.

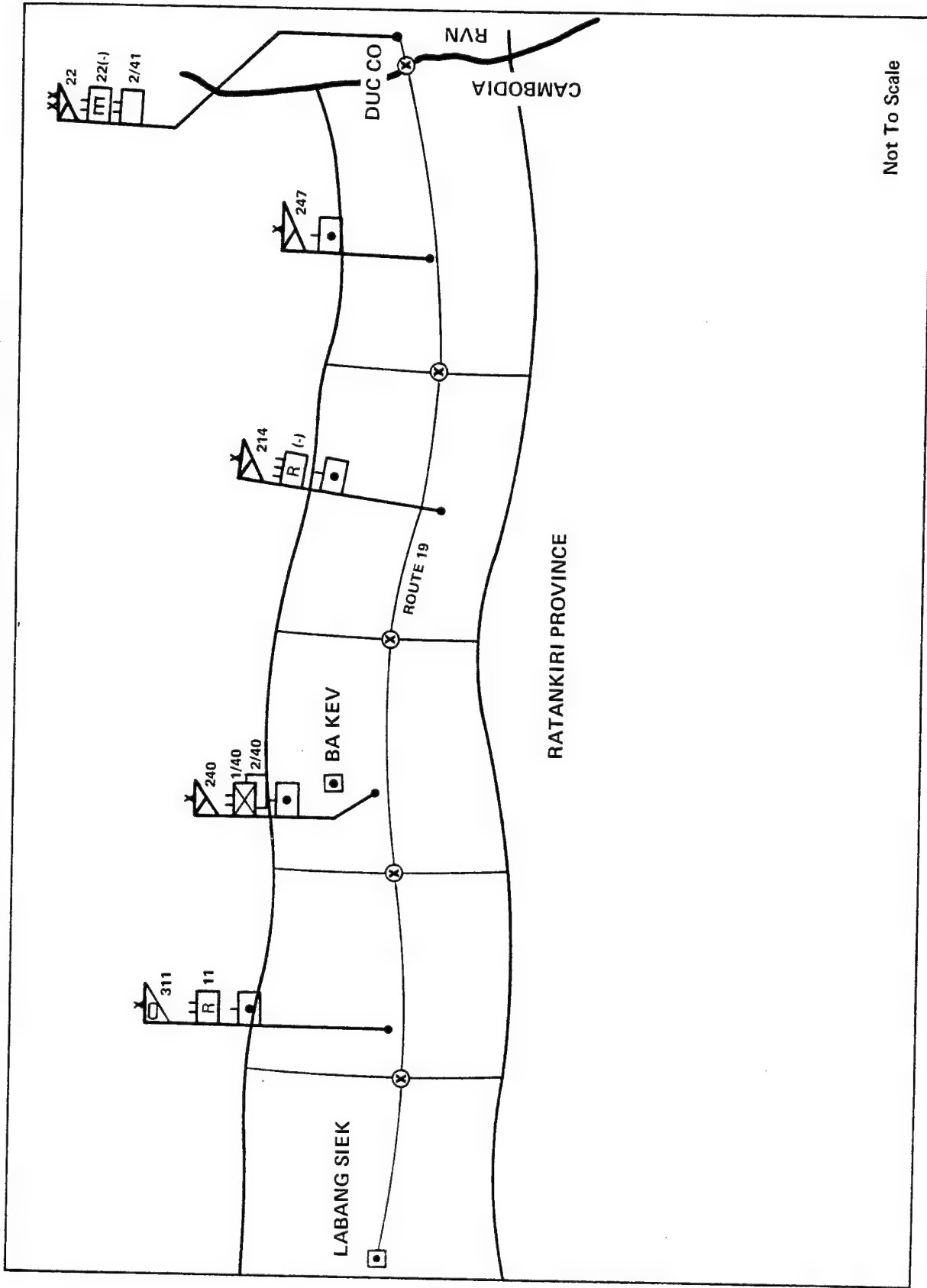
Task Force 240:

- 45th Infantry Regiment (6 battalions);
- 1 engineer platoon, 22d Combat Engineer Battalion;
- 1 mixed 105-mm/155-mm battery of six pieces.

Task Force 311:

- 3d Armored Cavalry Squadron;

Map 21 - The Evacuation of Khmer Forces from Ratankiri Province (BINH TAY 4)



11th Ranger Battalion;  
1 engineer company, 22d Combat Engineer Battalion;  
1 mixed 105-mm/155-mm battery of 6 pieces.

The operational plan of the 22d Division called for securing Route No. 19 from the RVN border westwards to Ba Kev, which was also the main axis of progress. Both flanks of this axis would be protected by U.S. air cavalry units and fire support would be provided by U.S. medium and heavy artillery units with their 8" howitzers and 175-mm guns positioned along Route No. 19 on the RVN side of the border. FANK troops at Labang Siek would fall back to Ba Kev, a distance of approximately 35 km by Route No. 19, during the first stage. From Ba Kev, part of the total contingent of Khmer troops from both bases would be airlifted and part of them would move by trucks toward Duc Co, approximately 70 km east on Route No. 19, which was the first receiving station. From Duc Co, the Khmer troop contingent would be directed toward Enari Base at Pleiku. The Special Forces camp at Duc Co was selected as the divisions's forward CP for the duration of the operation.

To complete preparations for the operation, the 22d Division moved its units from Pleiku and Binh Dinh to Duc Co, the staging area, by road. The 40th Regiment and one battalion of the 47th Regiment, however, were airlifted by U.S. aircraft from Binh Dinh directly to Duc Co. A total of 16 C-130 sorties completed this troop movement by noon of 23 June. The other battalion of the 47th Regiment was helilifted to Duc Co from Pleiku by 1930 hours the same day. The entire operational force, to include the forward CP of the 22d Division and all of its task forces, were thus assembled at Duc Co on 23 June.

Another troop movement which had not been planned but was completed on 23 June was the airlift of one company of the 22d Ranger Battalion to Labang Siek. This company was to protect the Labang Siek airfield while U.S. aircraft picked up the Khmer garrison. The purpose of this change in plans was to speed up the evacuation of



Labang Siek.

At 0800 hours on 26 June, Task Force 214 began to move from Duc Co toward the Cambodian border along Route 19, followed immediately by the 20th Combat Engineer Battalion, Task Force 247 and Task Force 311. During the advance, U.S. observation planes and air cavalry gunships flew cover on both flanks to the north and south of the axis. Task Force 240, which was to be helilifted from Duc Co to a landing zone east of Ba Kev, had to delay embarkation until 1000 hours because of bad weather and heavy rains. By 1545 hours, all helilift movements were completed, and TF 240 was in Ba Kev along with its artillery battery. On their return trip to Duc Co, U.S. helicopters picked up a number of Khmer refugees at Ba Kev. Then at 1945 hours the same day, TF 311 linked up with TF 240 at Ba Kev as planned. The timely progress of ARVN task forces along Route 19 had been made possible by the rapid work done by ARVN engineers along the axis of advance. About 200 Khmer refugees at Ba Kev were also evacuated toward Duc Co during the day. To provide support for ARVN task forces during the night, U.S. gunships and flareships flew cover missions over the area of operation until daylight.

During the morning of 25 June, TF 311 continued its westward advance along Route 19 in order to clear the road toward Labang Siek and to link up with the Khmer garrison moving eastward from the base. From Labang Siek, a convoy of 111 mixed military and civilian vehicles began to move out at 0900 hours toward the RVN border. The convoy was joined by many Khmer refugees moving on foot. At approximately 1400 hours, this convoy linked up with TF 311 and continued its journey toward Ba Kev. Upon reaching Ba Kev, all Khmer refugees from Labang Siek were picked up by U.S. helicopters and transported to Duc Co. When the day was over, they were all safe at Duc Co. During the night, however, another influx of 600 Khmer refugees from Labang Siek reached Ba Kev.

During the day of 25 June, the 214th Battalion was helilifted from Ba Kev to reinforce TF 214 because of intelligence reports that the enemy would try to interdict Route 19 in its area of operation.

TF 214 was already thinly spread over a large area. At night, U.S. flareships and gunships continued their support mission over the area of operation.

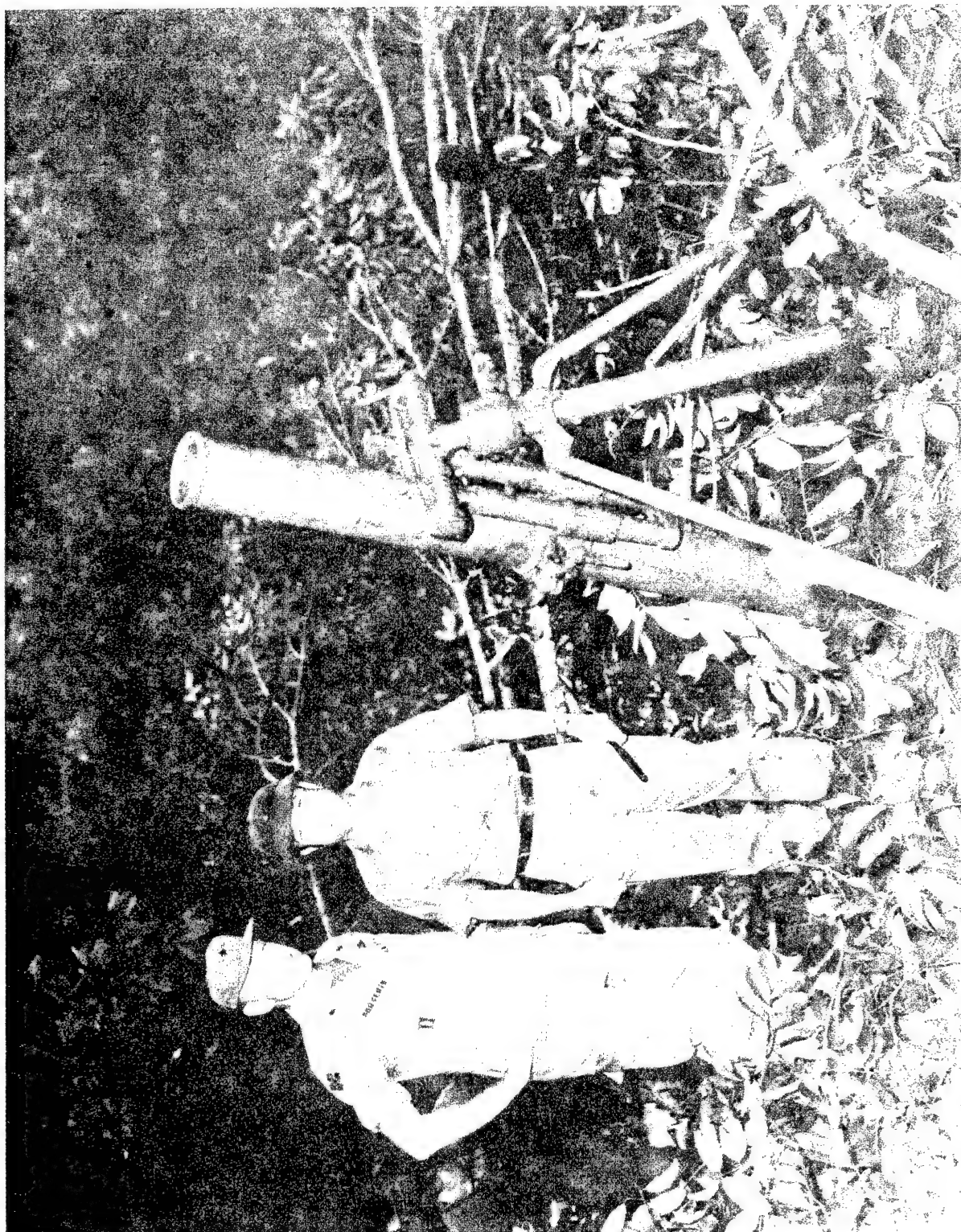
On 26 June, beginning at 0750 hours, a convoy of approximately 30 vehicles carrying Khmer refugees moved out of Ba Kev toward the RVN border. At the same time, U.S. helicopters also picked up the remainder of Khmer refugees at Ba Kev and transported them to Duc Co. By late afternoon of 26 June, the evacuation of this Cambodian base had been completed to include the garrison troops, their equipment, dependents, and other refugees. While the movement was in progress from Ba Kev, at Duc Co, those Khmer troops, dependents and refugees who had been there the previous day, were transported to Camp Enari Pleiku where they were accommodated and fed by RVN provincial authorities, pending return to Phnom Penh.

After the evacuation of Ba Kev had been completed, our ARVN task forces began to withdraw from Cambodia. At noon on 26 June, TF 240 was the first to be extracted by U.S. helicopters. By 1500 hours, the entire task force had been assembled at Duc Co. From Duc Co, the task force boarded U.S. C-130 cargo planes to return to Binh Dinh. Then Task Force 311, followed by TF 214 and TF 247 also successively withdrew by road toward the RVN border. The last ARVN element of TF 311 crossed the border at 1830 hours. While TF 247 continued to move toward Pleiku, TF 311 and 214 remained at Duc Co for the night.

The entire operation was considered terminated on 27 June 1970 after the evacuation of Labang Siek and Ba Kev had been completed. By that date, a total of 7,571 Khmer to include troops, dependents and refugees, had been accommodated at Camp Enari in Pleiku. Among the weapons evacuated from both Cambodian military bases were four 76-mm artillery pieces and several cal .50 machine guns. ARVN casualties during the operation amounted to two killed and eight wounded. The enemy lost six killed and two individual weapons.

Table 1 — Recapitulation of Results, ARVN II Corps and  
U.S. Field Force I Cross Border Operations

Operation	Friendly Losses			Enemy Losses					
	KIA	WIA	MIA	Killed	Detained	Rallier	C-S Weapons	Indiv. Weapons	Rice (tons)
BINH TAY I	63	118	0	212	7	10	20	859	591
BINH TAY II	7	34	0	73	6	0	136	476	88.8
BINH TAY III	38	113	2	149	2	1	85	581	447
BINH TAY IV	2	8	0	6	0	0	0	2	0



120-mm Mortar Captured during BINH TAY III



Crates of Ammunition Captured during BINH TAY III





82-mm Mortar Ammunition Captured during BINH TAY III



Enemy Small Arms Captured during BINH TAY III

## CHAPTER V

Cooperation and Coordination from 30 April to 30 June 1970

### *U.S.-RVN Cooperation and Coordination*

For the JGS, the question of launching ground operations across the national border to destroy NVA and VC logistic bases and supply points was not simply a military question; such an incursion would have important political ramifications as well. For his part, President Nguyen Van Thieu, being a senior and experienced military officer, understood very well the military value to the RVNAF/U.S. military effort to be derived from destroying the enemy bases in Cambodia. Barely one day after Sihanouk was deposed, President Thieu declared, "If Cambodia and South Vietnam and her allies cooperate along the border, then I believe the Communists would find it impossible to stay." Therefore, when General Abrams, COMUSMACV consulted with the JGS on this question, General Cao Van Vien, Chief of the JGS, immediately reported to President Thieu for guidance and a decision. Before authorizing the RVNAF to conduct operations into Cambodia, President Thieu certainly would have consulted the U.S. Ambassador in Saigon and obtained his concurrence and support. He had several reasons for doing this. In the first place, no matter how badly the RVN wanted to destroy enemy bases beyond its border, it would not be able to do so alone, without American concurrence and support. Second, South Vietnam was still officially estranged from Cambodia; there had been no diplomatic relations between the two countries during the last seven years. Any military incursion into Cambodia, which was a declared neutral state, would have to be pre-arranged under American political auspices.

But what concerned President Thieu most was RVNAF military



capabilities and South Vietnam's own security problem.

Despite continued development and modernization, the RVNAF had yet to prove their combat capabilities in large-scale military operations, particularly when these operations were to take place in the unfamiliar terrain of a neighboring country. Besides, what would happen to South Vietnam's own backyard if the bulk of its main force units were to move away, leaving the maintenance of security in the hands of the unreliable RF and PF troops? But the major problem with large-scale, cross-border operations seemed to be the RVNAF's own limitations in support assets, particularly artillery, helicopters and tactical air.

Most ARVN military assets belonged to infantry divisions but were semi-permanently committed to the support of the country-wide base and outpost system. Some divisional artillery units were, therefore, deployed piecemeal by sections of two pieces each all over the country to provide area-type support. If they were to be reassembled into batteries and battalions and committed to operations beyond the border, then there would be a void in firepower support within South Vietnam and territorial security would be in jeopardy. No outpost or hamlet under attack would then be able to hold without artillery support.

The status of heliborne mobility was even worse. At this time, there was only one UH-1 squadron available for operational purposes in each corps area. Other squadrons, being newly activated, were still undergoing training. Although operational for some time, our helicopter squadrons were still inexperienced in night operations and in formation flights required for large-scale heliborne assaults. In addition, a VNAF helicopter was not unlike a jack-of-all-trades; it could be used for any type of mission: helilift, medevac or resupply, but never solely for any single purpose. For these reasons, the RVNAF could not afford to devote all helicopter assets to cross-border operations; daily needs for resupply and medevac within each corps area would not allow that. Also, the RVNAF at that time did not have the greater capacity CH-47 and depended entirely on U.S. Army aviation units for this type of transport.

As far as tactical air was concerned, the RVNAF were seriously

handicapped in long-range support assets. In early 1970, the VNAF had only five squadrons of mixed A-1H, A-37 and F-5A fighter-bombers. These aircraft had low speed and limited load capacity; their performance was also affected by adverse weather conditions. As a result, even within the country, tactical air support for outposts under attack or combat operations usually depended on the U.S. Air Force. It was obvious that in its current status, the VNAF would not be able to contribute much to the support of cross-border operations.

Both the JGS and MACV were well aware of these shortcomings. To alleviate the territorial security burden on the RVNAF and enable them to devote all of their efforts to the Cambodian theater of operation, the JGS and MACV conducted a comprehensive reassessment of the security situation. Decisions were made as to which ARVN units could be redeployed from their tactical areas of responsibility without compromising security, which areas could be effectively handled by territorial forces alone, and which areas would require either a takeover by U.S. and FWMA forces or an extension of their tactical areas of responsibility once ARVN units were removed. As far as support was concerned, it was agreed that U.S. forces would perform firepower, medevac and resupply missions within the country in the place of RVNAF units, so as to release them for cross-border activities.

During April 1970, the RVNAF were thus able to initiate operational activities in Cambodia without concern for security and support problems back home. During these initial operations, no U.S. advisers accompanied ARVN units into Cambodia; they were still not authorized to cross the RVN border. Despite this apparent non-involvement, U.S. forces provided maximum support for these operations. During Operation TOAN THANG 41, for example, the U.S. Field Force II made loans of M4T6 pontoons, enabling III Corps to establish river-crossing facilities for its armored vehicles. The U.S. 25th Infantry Division also cooperated in establishing a screen along the western bank of the Vam Co East River inside South Vietnam to block enemy escape routes. To help increase the number of serviceable armored vehicles required for combat operations, the U.S. Field Force II reinforced the 3rd Area Logistics Command with

tracked vehicle repair teams. Within the 24 hours before operation TOAN THANG 42 was to be launched, these teams helped repair eight unserviceable T-113's for the 18th Armored Cavalry Squadron and replace another six M-41 tanks. As a result, the number of ARVN serviceable armored vehicles committed in this operation was increased significantly. Also, during this operation, U.S. command and gunships flew support missions for ARVN units although they never landed on Cambodian soil.

These events clearly indicated that not only had the U.S. consented to cross-border operations by the RVNAF, it was also fully backing them to the extent permitted by its policies. The U.S. was well aware that without its consent and support, the RVNAF would hardly be able to initiate these operations by themselves. American support became stronger and more direct beginning on 1 May 1970 when U.S. forces received the green light to participate in the Cambodian incursion. As of that date, U.S. advisers were also authorized to accompany ARVN units into Cambodia within the self-imposed limit of 30 km or 21.7 miles. As a result, ARVN units in Cambodia began to receive artillery support from heavier U.S. 8" and 175-mm pieces in addition to their organic 105-mm and 155-mm howitzers. To each ARVN task force was attached U.S. artillery forward observers from the U.S. 23rd Artillery Group. U.S. tactical air and B-52 sorties were also increased for the benefit of ARVN units. This made quite a difference for these ARVN units which prior to 1 May had only the weaker support of the Vietnam Air Force.

For the better use of combined RVN-U.S. firepower assets, senior U.S. advisors to ARVN task forces initiated the establishment of fire coordination centers (FCC) whose members included the senior adviser, a U.S. artillery officer, an ARVN forward artillery observer, and a VNAF forward air controller team. These FCCs provided for the maximum use of both United States and RVN artillery and air firepower.

#### *RVN-Khmer Cooperation and Coordination*

Immediately after General Lon Nol took power, GVN Vice President

Nguyen Cao Ky made secret trips to Phnom Penh twice during April 1970 and an official visit in early May. During this official visit, he was accompanied by Lt. General Nguyen Van Vy, our Minister of Defense. These visits had the objectives of reestablishing diplomatic relations between the RVN and Cambodia and discussing measures of mutual assistance between the two countries. Since the new Cambodian regime had proved inimical to North Vietnam, in contrast to Sihanouk's policies, its survival was deemed of vital importance to South Vietnam's security.

Following Vice President Ky's shuttles between Saigon and Phnom Penh, Colonel Lon Non, younger brother of General Lon Nol, appeared several times in Saigon at the Independence Palace and had contacts with other GVN high-ranking officials. Also, to solve the problem of Vietnamese residents in Cambodia living in refugee camps and estimated at between 60,000 and 75,000 a GVN delegation headed by Tran Nguon Phieu, Minister of Public Health and Education, flew to Phnom Penh in April 1970 to negotiate their repatriation with the Cambodian authorities. Members of this delegation also included representatives of the Ministry of Defense and the Joint General Staff, whose mission it was to assess the situation and study measures for the evacuation of Vietnamese residents.

In retrospect from a legal point of view, it is clearly evident that the RVNAF incursion into Cambodia was conducted with the consent and authorization of the Cambodian government. President Thieu in effect declared to the foreign and domestic press on 8 May 1970 that between himself and General Lon Nol, there had been "agreement in principle" two or three days before the initiation of cross-border operations. To further cement the bonds of friendship between the two countries after the RVNAF had successfully cleared the Mekong River and Kompong Cham, President Thieu flew to Neak Luong where he paid a courtesy visit to General Lon Nol. This first meeting between the two national leaders was also attended by General Cao Van Vien, Chief of the JGS, and the Vietnamese field commanders who had directed the clearing operations, Lt. General Do Cao Tri and Lt. General Ngo Dzu. Playing host to the Cambodian guests, President Thieu entertained

them with a luncheon catered by the famous Hotel Caravelle in Saigon. The food and drink were flown from Saigon to Neak Luong by VNAF helicopters.

For purposes of coordinating combined activities, field commanders of both nations shuttled frequently between South Vietnam and Cambodia. This was particularly true of the commanders of MR-1 and MR-2 on the Khmer side and III Corps and IV Corps on the RVNAF side. At the next lower level, ARVN task force commanders usually met with Cambodian province and district chiefs for the purpose of operational planning.

To provide effective support for combined RVNAF and FANK operations in border areas, straddling both the RVN MR-4 and the Khmer MR-2, the Delta Military Assistance Command (DMAC) took the initiative in establishing a Combined Operations Center (COC) at the Chi Lang Training Center in Chau Doc Province. Although primarily a U.S.-RVNAF facility, staffed by IV Corps and DMAC representatives, this center also included FANK liaison officers. The Chi Lang COC was responsible for the effectively coordinated support activities for river convoys bringing supplies to Phnom Penh. An average of 8 to 12 river convoys reached the Khmer capital each month with needed supplies such as rice, fuel, ammunition, and other basic commodities. The Mekong River had become a most vital supply route for the Cambodian capital ever since road communication with the Tonle Sap and Battambang, two food-rich areas of the country, was interdicted in early August 1970 by Khmer communists and NVA forces. The survival of the new Khmer regime and the population of Phnom Penh, therefore, depended to a great extent on the safeguarding of the Mekong River. This could not be done without the assistance of the RVN and its armed forces.

In tactical matters, one area of cooperation which benefited the FANK most was intelligence support. For years, intelligence work had become routine for the RVN and U.S. forces who had to constantly monitor the enemy and his activities in South Vietnam. This knowledge and experience proved of tremendous value to combat operations in Cambodia,

since the NVA units involved there were the same ones that had been operating in South Vietnam. For the FANK, however, NVA forces were something entirely unfamiliar because they had been primarily concerned with the local Khmer communists. So an intelligence collection network was set up in Cambodian provinces and districts adjacent to South Vietnam by the ARVN 101st Unit which operated under the control of our J-2, JGS, from the very beginning of the Cambodian incursion. During the first two months of its operation, May and June 1970, it passed on all intelligence collected by ARVN combat units concerning Khmer security to the FANK General Staff because no FANK units operated alongside ARVN units during this period. With the advent of combined RVNAF-FANK operations in Cambodia, intelligence became a vital area of cooperation and coordination. To make this cooperation and coordination more significant, the JGS and the FANK General Staff came to an agreement that all Khmer communist prisoners captured by ARVN forces would be turned over to FANK units for interrogation and exploitation. When the areas around Phnom Penh were penetrated and attacked, several Vietnamese Communist sappers were captured by the FANK, but the G-2 Division of the FANK General Staff, which lacked background on NVA and VC forces, was unable to exploit them properly. To assist the FANK General Staff in this unfamiliar task, the J-2, JGS began to detach its interrogation teams to Phnom Penh. These teams proved of tremendous assistance to the G-2, FANK General Staff because of their familiarity with enemy units, their coded designation system and their background.

Cooperation and coordination in intelligence activities between the RVNAF and the FANK became ever closer after the initiation of tripartite meetings, in July 1970. During these meetings, an important item on the agenda was a briefing on enemy activities concerning both South Vietnam and Cambodia, conducted by the J-2 of MACV or our JGS.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Major General William E. Potts, U.S. Army or Colonel Hoang Ngoc Lung, ARVN

With regard to manpower and equipment required for the development of the FANK, the RVN was also most helpful. In addition to the 4,000 CIDG troopers of Khmer origin made available to the FANK, the JGS and MACV also eventually shipped more than 10,000 captured AK-47 assault rifles and approximately 7,200 surplus M2 carbines to Phnom Penh. These 4,000 CIDG troops contributed effectively to the defense of Phnom Penh by defeating attacks launched by NVA units into the Cambodian capital's surrounding areas. In addition, the GVN also authorized Cambodian recruiters entry into areas where Vietnamese of Khmer descent resided in the Mekong Delta, and enabled them to recruit former KKK members who had served as CIDG troops of the RVN Special Forces, and fought in border areas for many years.

A major problem that the FANK General Staff had to face in its efforts to expand Khmer combat forces was the lack of a good training base and training facilities. To assist the FANK in solving this problem which was made more difficult by increased fighting and a deteriorating situation, the JGS and MACV agreed to provide training for the FANK at military schools and training centers in South Vietnam. As the first step, approximately 5,500 Khmer recruits were given basic training every month at the Chi Lang Training Center in Chau Doc Province. The RVNAF also provided transportation for Khmer students to and from Chi Lang, either by VNAF planes or by river supply convoys. All training expenses and supplies incurred by Khmer trainees were first covered by RVNAF funds which were later reimbursed by MACV. The kind of modern training provided by the RVNAF was very beneficial to the FANK, whether in basic military training or in specialist training, because being organized by the French and equipped with obsolescent weapons, the FANK had very low combat capabilities and practically no combat experience. To familiarize Khmer field grade officers with modern warfare tactics and techniques, the RVNAF also conducted a special training course for 28 FANK majors and lieutenant colonels at the Dalat Command and Staff College in late December 1970. These graduates were later assigned command responsibilities in FANK units.

Also to assist the FANK in their development efforts, the JGS and MACV conducted several orientation tours for high-ranking Khmer officers and governmental officials during which they observed and learned organizational and operational techniques at RVNAF agencies and major units. In particular, Khmer officials of province and district levels paid several visits to the provinces of Vinh Binh and Ba Xuyen where they had the opportunity to observe the pacification and development program at work among the local population, mostly Vietnamese of Khmer descent.

Air support was another major area of close cooperation between the RVNAF and the FANK. After its withdrawal from Cambodia on 30 June 1970, the U.S. continued to conduct some air activity in Cambodia, especially in the area of Kratie-Stung Treng, northeast of Phnom Penh, in order to interdict NVA infiltration and prevent return of the NVA to its destroyed base areas near the border. Because of political sensitivities, U.S. aircraft were not authorized to land in Cambodia after 30 June 1970; but they could perform overflight support missions. U.S. aircraft were also denied the offensive role. During their support missions, such as flying air cover for river convoys, U.S. gunships were allowed to return fire only when being fired at from the ground. The Khmer Air Force, meanwhile, had only a modest capability. It included a few MIG-15 and 17 aircraft which were grounded most of the time for lack of replacement parts, hence unavailable for operational support. To increase support for the FANK, and with the approval of the Khmer government, the VNAF, in early August 1970, detached two A-1 Skyraider flights (six aircraft), several observation planes and two AC-119 flare-gunships to Pochentong airfield on a permanent basis. All VNAF support missions in Cambodia were coordinated by the Air Support Operations Center (ASOC), VNAF Air Operations Command, which was installed at Khmer Air Force Headquarters. In addition, to help the FANK solve their medical evacuation and resupply problems, MACV loaned six UH-1H helicopters to the VNAF, all placed under the control of the VNAF ASOC at Pochentong. These six helicopters were earmarked for the Khmer Air Force but temporarily operated by VNAF crews for the support



of Khmer ground troops, since Khmer helicopter flight crews were undergoing training in Saigon. Repair and maintenance on these helicopters was performed by VNAF specialist teams at Pochentong. They were eventually taken over by Khmer Air Force maintenance crews still undergoing training. But air rescue missions were all performed by VNAF aircraft with ground security provided by FANK or RVNAF units in their respective tactical areas of responsibility.

During the night of 21 January 1971, NVA sappers penetrated the Pochentong Air Base located approximately ten kilometers west of Phnom Penh and conducted a most damaging sabotage which affected Khmer capability to provide air support. While the civilian aviation terminal suffered only physical damage, almost all Khmer military aircraft (nearly 98%) were destroyed. The only Caravelle jet transport of Air Cambodge escaped sure destruction because it was in Bangkok when the sabotage took place. The Caravelle had just completed its official mission, bringing back General Lon Nol from Saigon in the morning and flew on to Bangkok that very afternoon. Strange as it may have appeared, the VNAF section at Pochentong was unaffected by the sabotage. No VNAF aircraft among the 20 fighter-bombers, observation planes, and gunships suffered any damage because the VNAF area was heavily guarded by its own troops. But the seemingly selective sabotage of NVA sappers, unfortunately, gave rise to false rumors that it was conducted by RVN troops.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to tactical training, logistic and air support, the JGS also assisted the FANK in several other ways, for example, the defense of Phnom Penh against enemy shellings and sapper attacks. Such defense was deemed extremely important for Phnom Penh, as it was for Saigon, because beginning in September 1970, NVA artillery and sapper units became extensively active in the areas surrounding the Cambodian capital. For FANK officers responsible for the defense and

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<sup>2</sup>The rumors were voiced in the Saigon newspapers, perhaps the doing of the Communists. Colonel Amos, who was Defense Attache in the U.S. Embassy in Phnom Penh at the time of the attack, has stated that no member of the U.S. Embassy in Phnom Penh ever heard such rumors or considered the attack to be other than the work of the VC/NVA, nor did the embassy ever hear any Khmer official describe the attack as anything but the work of the Communists.

protection of Phnom Penh to benefit from the RVNAF experience and techniques, they were authorized by the JGS to visit the RVN Capital Military Region's system of defense against shellings. At the same time, the VNN also conducted briefings for Khmer naval officers on security and protective measures against enemy naval sappers; and on naval escort tactics applicable to river convoys on the Mekong River. The JGS also initiated contingency plans for the relief of Phnom Penh in case of emergency. These plans were prepared by IV Corps Headquarters and included contingencies for the evacuation of RVN embassy and military liaison mission personnel from Phnom Penh. When they learned of these evacuation plans, the embassies of the Republics of China and Korea in Phnom Penh also asked for assistance in evacuation by the RVN military mission in case of emergency.

All of these examples of cooperation and coordination arrangements had been considered routine by the U.S. and the RVN for several years. To Cambodia, they were a novelty; they also caused serious difficulties for the FANK for the simple reason that this small and ill-equipped military force had very limited capabilities and was unable to confront enemy aggression alone. This was anticipated by the U.S. when it terminated combat operations in Cambodia. But the U.S. was handicapped by domestic political pressure and could not do as much to assist the FANK as it had the RVNAF. For example, the U.S. could not resume combat operations in Cambodia after the 30 June self-imposed deadline. Neither could it assign military advisers to FANK units. Because of its inability to provide this kind of support by itself, the U.S. encouraged the RVNAF to increase their assistance to the FANK in the key areas of combat operations, training, and logistics. This assistance came to be a real source of pride for the RVNAF servicemen, who had contributed their efforts and even sacrificed their lives for the benefit of their Khmer allies. But if because of this security assistance, Cambodia became free of enemy domination, then South Vietnam's security would also be greatly enhanced; perhaps this was a chance for an early settlement of the war.

### *The Tripartite Meetings*

During the period of the Cambodian incursion, it was the RVNAF that played the most active role in cooperation and coordination with Khmer forces. Rarely, if ever, did the initiative for cooperation come from the Cambodian side. This reluctance or inertia could be attributed perhaps to the traditional suspicion and animosity that Cambodians had always felt toward their Vietnamese neighbors. In addition, at this time when diplomatic relations between the two countries had just been resumed there was a tendency for each to give its own point of view first priority vis-a-vis the other. To help dispel this animosity, the U.S. initiated monthly meetings among the participating nations, the RVN, the U.S. and Cambodia, which came to be known as Tripartite meetings. The first of these meetings took place in early July 1970, after the U.S. had terminated its combat activities in Cambodia. Each national delegation to the Tripartite meetings was led by a high-ranking military officer. The RVN delegation was usually led by Lt. General Nguyen Van Manh, Chief of Staff of the JGS. His Cambodian counterpart was Lt. General Sak Sutsakhan, Chief of Staff of the FANK. The U.S. was represented by the Deputy COMUSMACV. These meetings took place every month at MACV Headquarters, the JGS Headquarters, or the FANK General Staff Headquarters in Phnom Penh. The chiefs of delegations served as co-chairmen and took turns presiding over the meetings.

In addition to the Tripartite meetings, there was also an exchange of permanent military liaison missions between the RVNAF and the FANK under the control of the respective national delegations. The RVNAF military liaison mission was established in Phnom Penh and headed by Colonel To Van Kiem, Deputy Chief J-3, JGS, while the Cambodian counterpart mission in Saigon was headed by Brigadier General Pok Sam An, Assistant Chief of Staff for Operations, FANK General Staff. The Military elements of the U.S. Embassy in Phnom Penh provided U.S. military liaison to the FANK General Staff.

As a result of these meetings and the exchange of military liaison missions, cooperation and coordination improved greatly between

Cambodia and the RVN. Areas of interest that had thus far remained exclusive and one-sided, such as operational planning, intelligence, and logistic support, became common grounds for cooperation. In addition to the major common concern for the protection of the Mekong River and keeping Phnom Penh adequately supplied, there were two important areas of close cooperation and coordination between the JGS and the FANK General Staff: (1) combined activities of the RVN III Corps and the FANK 1st Military Region, and (2) combined activities of the RVN IV Corps and the FANK 2nd Military Region.

The U.S. initiative to institute tripartite meetings greatly contributed to the consolidation of cooperation and coordination between Cambodia and the RVN. It also helped dispel deep-rooted animosities and prejudices which had existed to some extent between the two nations but had been unfortunately amplified beyond imagination by a fanatical press. As a matter of fact, relations between the RVN and Cambodia were never better or so close as after the institution of tripartite meetings; they were always conducted in a most cooperative spirit and all problems of common interest were solved to the satisfaction of the parties concerned. This spirit of cooperation existed not only at the national level or the general staff level; it also pervaded lower tactical and administrative levels as well and every aspect of combined operations. Historically, this close cooperation was an unprecedented development between Vietnam and Cambodia.

#### *RVN-U.S. Plans for Cambodia After 30 June 1970*

While the Cambodian incursion was in full progress, Lt. General Michael S. Davison, U.S. Field Force II Commander and Lt. General Do Cao Tri, III Corps Commander jointly made plans for rainy season activities. Their ensuing directives were dissiminated to U.S. and ARVN units on or about 2 June 1970. According to these directives, III Corps forces were to continue operations in the zone along the Cambodian border, in order to prevent the enemy from resuming his activities and infiltrating

into South Vietnam. By 30 June, U.S. forces were to withdraw from Cambodia and operate in South Vietnam in the place of ARVN units committed across the border. In addition to these activities, U.S. artillery, tactical air, and possibly B-52's as well would be employed to interdict enemy infiltration. While ARVN units continued their operations in Cambodia, territorial and police forces, with the assistance and support of U.S. forces, were to maintain and consolidate security inside South Vietnam. This plan was subsequently revised on 20 September 1970 in keeping with the changing situation, since United States forces had already begun to redeploy from South Vietnam in increasing numbers.

The RVN-U.S. combined plan for the rainy season of 1970 was conceived with ambitious goals. It not only provided for the continuation of ARVN operations in Cambodia and the consolidation of security inside South Vietnam, but enabled the U.S. to continue withdrawing its forces as well. In terms of pacification and security, the plan placed emphasis on eliminating enemy local force units and infrastructure, driving them away from populous centers, destroying his remnant main force units, increasing the combat effectiveness of territorial forces, and pushing pacification and development efforts to success.

For the immediate future, at the onset of the approaching dry season, the RVNAF were to continue their activities in the Chup area (north of Krek) and west of Svay Rieng, along Route No. 1 from the border to Kompong Trabek. It was further planned that after Tet of 1971, the RVNAF would continue to conduct operations in the areas of Route No. 1 and Chup-Dambe. Security in South Vietnam would then improve to such a point as to be assumed primarily by territorial forces. This would allow the United States to continue the redeployment of its combat units.

One week after RVN and U.S. forces initiated combined operations in Cambodia, President Nixon announced that the RVNAF would probably withdraw from Cambodia at the same time as U.S. forces. This logic was based on the fact that if U.S. forces terminated combat activities in Cambodia, they would also remove all logistic and air support being

provided across the border. It was certainly true that RVNAF operations in Cambodia depended to a large extent on the U.S. support in helilift, airpower, and logistics. Consequently, if and when this support was withdrawn, the RVNAF would hardly be able to continue operations alone in Cambodia.

In the meantime, speaking for the RVN, Vice-President Nguyen Cao Ky declared to the foreign and domestic press during an interview on 1 June 1970 that "we have not determined when the RVNAF will withdraw from Cambodia. Cambodia and South Vietnam are like teeth and lips: if the lips are opened the teeth will get cold. On the other hand, we don't want to maintain our forces in Cambodia. Neither do we want to sit tight and watch North Vietnamese Communists use Cambodian territory freely as a staging area to launch attacks against South Vietnam as they have done for the past several years. The RVNAF have had their hands tied long enough. Now that they are enjoying freedom of action, we don't want to tie their hands again." Vice President Ky also emphasized that no outside pressure could take away the RVNAF freedom of action because they were acting for the sake of South Vietnam's security.

On 27 June 1970, President Nguyen Van Thieu announced on national TV several important decisions, namely: (1) the RVNAF would continue to operate on some Cambodian territory after the withdrawal of U.S. forces. The objective was to prevent NVA units from returning to the sanctuaries and bases that had just been destroyed; (2) the RVNAF would continue to evacuate from Cambodia those Vietnamese who desired to be repatriated; (3) the RVN was prepared to respond to the new Cambodian government's appeal for help against NVA aggression to the extent of its capabilities and when such a response was absolutely necessary; (4) future activities of the RVNAF would be initiated from South Vietnam and without the participation of U.S. advisers. All support required for these activities such as tactical air and logistics would be provided by the RVNAF; (5) the bulk of the RVNAF would be withdrawn from Cambodia; and (6) the main objective of South Vietnam

was to improve its own security and push Vietnamization toward success. All remaining activities on Cambodian soil served only to achieve this national GVN objective.

In addition during this same address, President Thieu confirmed and emphasized that the RVNAF would concentrate their efforts on improving domestic security. He reiterated that South Vietnam always respected Cambodia's territorial sovereignty, national borders, independence and neutrality and that it would never interfere in Cambodia's internal political problems. Finally, he asserted that the RVNAF neither wanted to maintain their units permanently in Cambodia nor did they ever volunteer to fight for the benefit of the Khmer Armed Forces. The GVN had only responded to a specific request from Khmer authorities to fight a common enemy.

In mid-1971, during monthly tripartite meetings, the Cambodian government asked for the abrogation of the RVNAF zone of operation in Cambodia. To strike a compromise, the RVN proposed that the zone be reduced in depth to 10-15 km. This was no longer important for the RVN because after U.S. forces terminated their operations in Cambodia on 30 June 1970, we did not have the capability to make deep incursions. What really concerned the RVN was the total abrogation of its right of access into this zone on Cambodian soil. The RVN was afraid that without free access to this zone, the RVNAF would run into difficulties whenever they were required to conduct operations in pursuit of the enemy. Then NVA forces would use this zone again as a staging area for attacks against South Vietnam, and when the RVNAF wanted to strike back, we would have to obtain Cambodian clearance, which would require considerable time. However, if the zone was maintained, the RVNAF could go in and out of Cambodia with ease.

## CHAPTER VI

### Cross-Border Operations After 30 June 1970

After 30 June 1970, and the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Cambodia, the RVNAF continued to conduct operations in Cambodia in accordance with the agreements already worked out between the RVN and the Cambodian Government. A zone 60 km deep inside Cambodia was established for these future cross-border operations. Within this zone, RVNAF forces could operate on the basis of FANK/RVNAF coordination, and without further government-to-government negotiation. These operations went on until the signing of the Paris peace accords in January 1973. In this chapter are discussed three significant operations which took place during the period July - December 1970.<sup>1</sup>

#### *Toan Thang 42, Phase VI*

Phase VI of Toan Thang 42 was conducted by III Corps forces along Route 7 and Route 1 in Cambodia. (*Map 22*) It had as its missions:

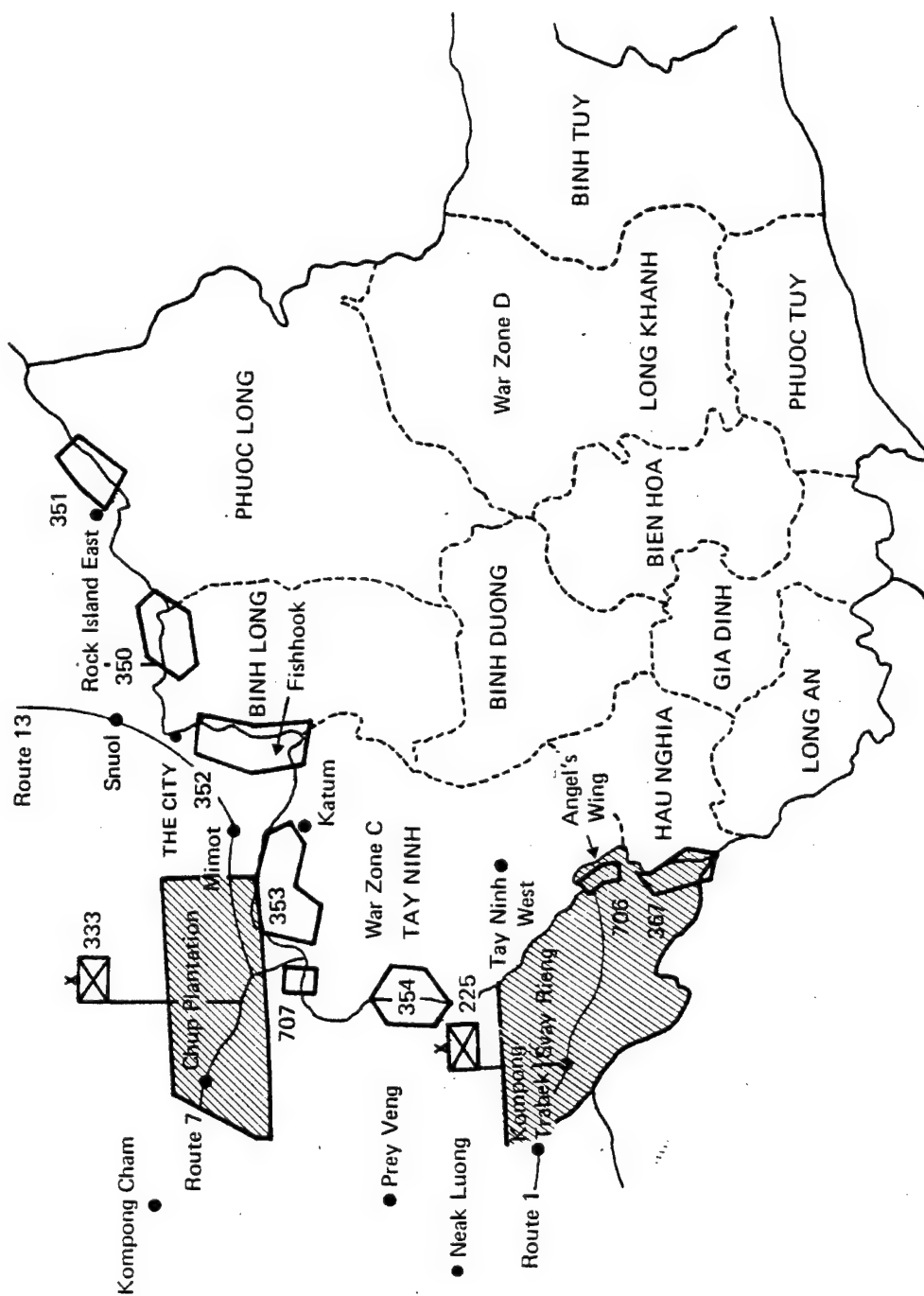
1. To prevent the enemy from returning to the base areas out of which he had been driven recently.
2. To interdict enemy movement into South Vietnam.

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<sup>1</sup>For descriptions of other cross-border operations in Cambodia by RVNAF units, see Sak Sutsakhan, The Khmer Republic at War and the Final Collapse, and Ngo Quang Truong, The Easter Offensive of 1972, both in this series.



Map 22 - Area of Operations for TOAN THANG 42, Phase VI



The results from TOAN THANG 42, Phase VI were very limited for the following reasons:

1. The rainy season inhibited movement.
2. The enemy had to reorganize and resupply himself.
3. The RVNAF no longer had the combat support of U.S. units, as had been the case prior to 30 June.
4. III Corps units, and all of the RVNAF were preparing for the coming dry season of 1970-71.

#### *CUU LONG 44*

CUU LONG 44 was conducted in order to assist the FANK in reopening and re-establishing security along Route 4. In September 1970, enemy forces, including units of the 1st NVA Division, had closed this LÔC by occupying the Pich Nil Pass. Several FANK outposts on Route 4 had been overrun in the process and other posts had been evacuated without resistance. Although the Mekong River was open, Route 4 was very important to the FANK and to the Cambodian Government for all types of supplies, but particularly for military equipment. When the FANK requested help on Route 4, the JGS assigned the mission to the Commander IV Corps. (*Map 23*)

Forces for CUU LONG 44 consisted of the 4th Armor Brigade and 4th Ranger Group from IV Corps. In addition, the JGS reinforced the operation with the 2nd Marine Brigade. These forces were organized for combat into two task forces. Task Force North consisted of the 2nd Marine Brigade (-) and the 12th Armor Regiment. It moved by vehicle, along Route 1 to Phnom Penh, and by Route 4 to Kompong Speu. Task Force South consisted of the 4th Armor Brigade (-) and the 4th Ranger Group. It departed Ha Tien on Route 16, and was to continue west to Route 4, then north to link up with Task Force North.

Command arrangements were as follows:

1. Task Force North was commanded by the Commander of the 2nd Marine Brigade.
2. Task Force South was commanded by Colonel Hoang Huu Gia, Commander, 4th Armor Brigade.



3. The overall operation was under the command of Colonel Vo Huu Hanh, Commander 44th Special Zone, who established his C.P. at Kompong Speu.

4. In addition to the above, the IV Corps Commander assigned his Special Assistant for Pacification, Brigadier General Nguyen Duy Hinh, to supervise all RVNAF forces and to take charge of coordination with FANK forces. Brigadier General Hinh collocated his CP with that of the Commander Khmer MR-2 at Kompong Speu.

In the north, it was a combined RVNAF/FANK operation, with the Vietnamese forces taking the lead and operating south along Route 4 toward Pich Nil Pass. Units were normally not more than one km off the road while moving south. However, the most significant action concerned the force advancing from the south toward Pich Nil Pass. Here two ARVN M-113s were destroyed by enemy fire. In order to regain the initiative, the IV Corps Commander, Major General Ngo Quang Truong ordered the move, by helicopter, of the 4th Marine Corps Battalion from Neak Luong to the area of difficulty south of Pich Nil.<sup>2</sup> With this reinforcement, the task force advancing from the south was able to move through Pich Nil Pass and link up with RVNAF and FANK forces north of the pass.

Air support was the responsibility of the VNAF 4th Air Division at Can Tho, whose assets were supplemented by U.S. air units, reconnaissance, tactical, and B-52. In addition, the U.S. DMAC Commander, Major General Cushman, arranged for the forward basing of U.S. fire support and medical evacuation helicopters at An Thoi on Phu Quoc Island, from where they were in a better position to support the forces operating in the south.

At the conclusion of the ten-day operation, all RVNAF units returned to Vietnam by secondary roads in order to help reestablish FANK security in the central portions of Routes 2 and 3.

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<sup>2</sup>Major General Truong replaced Major General General Dzu as Commander IV Corps in October 1970.

TOAN THANG 42/DAI BANG

In December 1970, following a series of attacks against FANK units located along routes 6 and 7 west and northwest of Kompong Cham, the enemy cut Route 7 and isolated Kompong Cham from Phnom Penh. At the request of the Cambodian Government (passed to Saigon via the RVN Embassy in Phnom Penh), President Thieu ordered the JGS to relieve Kompong Cham once more. This would be its third relief by RVNAF. The JGS passed the mission to the III Corps Commander and reinforced him with the Airborne Division from the ARVN General Reserve.<sup>3</sup> In addition, III Corps was given first priority on the use of all RVNAF helicopter assets.

(Map 24)

The 2d Airborne Brigade was helilifted from Tay Ninh to the airfield just west of Kompong Cham. It was accompanied by the light CP of the Airborne Division. From this CP, established at the airfield, Colonel Nguyen Trung Hau, Deputy Division Commander, coordinated ARVN activities west of the Mekong and the advance of the task force moving along Route 7 toward Kompong Cham. All ARVN activities were coordinated with FANK as well.

RVNAF forces received the same U.S. air support in this operation as in CUU LONG 44.

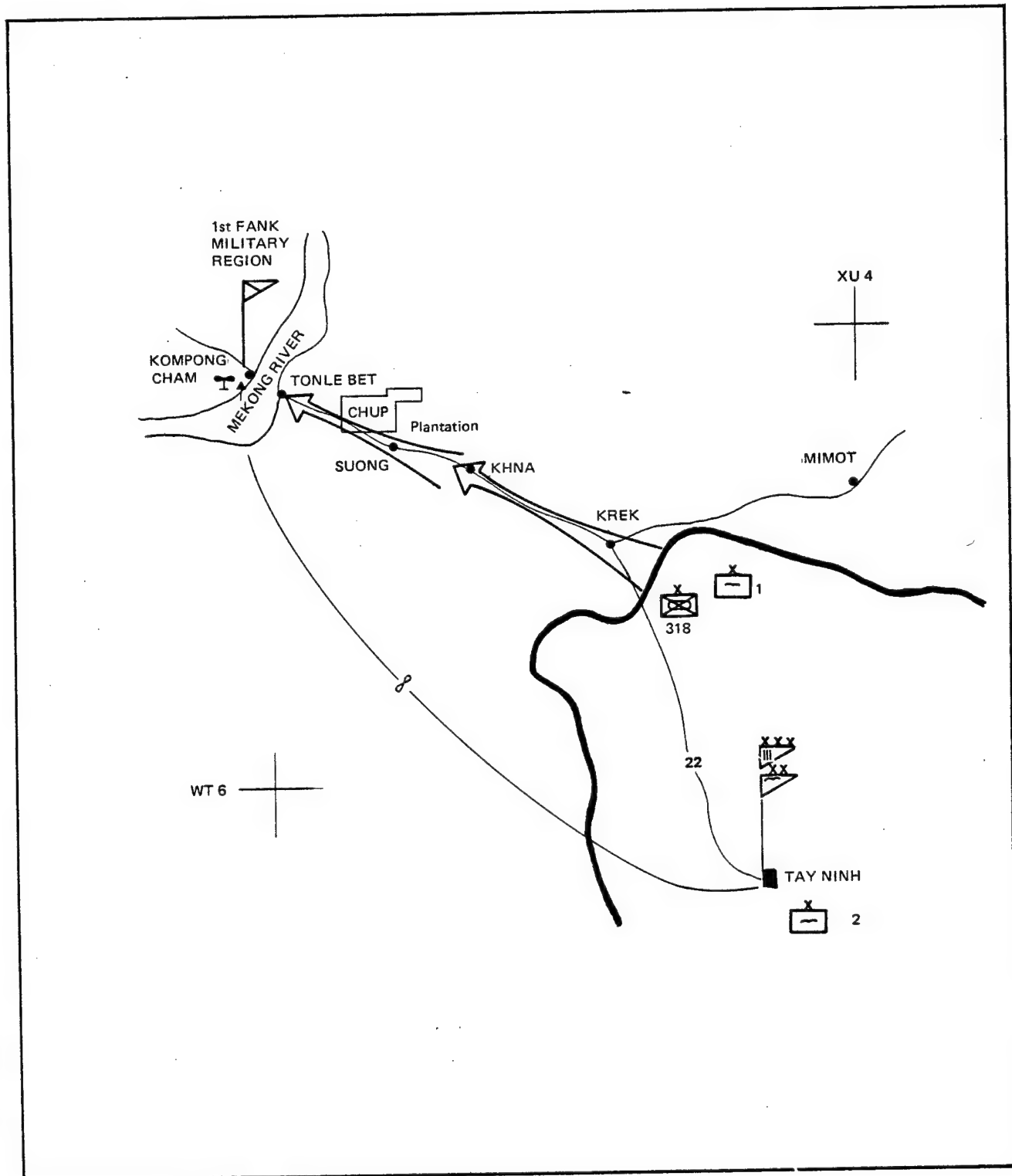
There was no significant contact with enemy main force units. Enemy reaction was limited to attacks by fire west of the Mekong and mining and harassment along Route 7 in the Chup area. After one week, ARVN forces withdrew to South Vietnam, by air and along Route 7.

Although this operation did little damage to the enemy, it ended a very real threat to Kompong Cham and was a great encouragement to the FANK. It also demonstrated that the ARVN could mount operations west of the Mekong on very short notice.

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<sup>3</sup> Dai Bang (Eagle) was incorporated into the name of the operation in view of the participation of the Airborne Division.

Map 24 — Area of Operations for TOAN THANG 42/ DAI BANG



## CHAPTER VII

### Khmer Participation

#### *Background*

Cambodia's participation - or to put it more accurately its being dragged into the Indochinese conflict - dated rather far back in the political history of Cambodia. The dominant personality of this entire period was unquestionably Prince Norodom Sihanouk who, first as reigning King, and then as Chief of State, held nearly absolute power for more than 30 years in this tiny kingdom which shares over one half of its national boundaries with South Vietnam.

Following the Geneva Accords of 1954, Cambodia adopted a policy of strict neutrality and non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries. It was a policy that Cambodia maintained until 1962. During the first years of experimenting with neutrality, the fact should be admitted that Cambodia was having numerous and quite serious difficulties with its immediate neighbors, Thailand to the west and South Vietnam to the east. These difficulties stemmed from border disputes that Prince Sihanouk described as "annexationist design" on the part of our neighbors. Of these many disputes, the affair of Preah Vihear was the best known because the drawn-out legal battle for it was terminated only by a formal decision of the International Court of Justice at the Hague.<sup>1</sup> Relations with the Republic of Vietnam had also known some bad moments, caused by many border incidents, themselves the result of pursuit operations carried out by the RVNAF against the VC and NVA.

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<sup>1</sup>Prea Vihear is an ancient Khmer Temple located on the Cambodian-Thai border, almost directly north of Phnom Penh. For a number of years, there was a dispute between the two governments as to whether the temple was, in fact, in Cambodia or Thailand. Submitted to the International Court of Justice, the Court ruled in favor of Cambodia in early 1962. Dean Acheson represented Cambodia.

It should be noted that with each of these incidents, whether on the Thai or RVN border, the Royal Cambodian Government directed representations and protests not only to the government concerned, but, at the same time to the United States. This latter was done because Cambodia considered that the U.S. could exercise its political influence on Thailand and the RVN to halt the border incidents. Only nothing ever came of the Cambodian protests, and these border incidents, by then become more and more frequent, constituted one of the causes for the change in policy adopted by Prince Sihanouk during the years preceeding the entry of Cambodia into the Indochina conflict.

Encouraged by the visit to Phnom Penh of Prime Minister Nehru in 1954, and by the conference of Ban Dung in April 1955, where he met Chou En Lai, Prince Sihanouk saw, from the Cambodian point of view, indisputable advantages in a policy of strict neutrality, and, in order to demonstrate the authenticity of the newly achieved Cambodian independence, a policy dictated by neither France nor the United States, Sihanouk denounced the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO).

But Cambodia's immediate neighbors, Thailand and South Vietnam, saw differently; they considered Cambodia's neutrality an open invitation for Communist penetration. And thus began the cold war between Cambodia and its two neighbors.

During the 1962 Geneva Conference on Laos, Prince Sihanouk recommended a neutralized zone made up of Cambodia and Laos. The outcome of this conference left him disappointed, however, because not only was his idea rejected, he also saw Laos partitioned. The prospect of Cambodia turning into another Laos in the future deeply worried him and led him to adopt a new policy line which sought to strike a certain balance between the east and the west in Cambodia.

During this same period, the situation in South Vietnam continued to deteriorate. And when the military coup against Ngo Dinh Diem's regime occurred in November 1963 during which the South Vietnamese president was killed, Prince Sihanouk was faced with a political dilemma of having to choose between two alternatives: Communism or the Free World. He found neither sufficiently reassuring for his regime and Cambodia's future.



Sihanouk had been led to believe in the growing danger of U.S. aid from his visit to Peking in early 1963 during which the Chinese expressed their concerns about the increasing American presence in Cambodia on the one hand and the presence of CIA-supported Khmer Serei troops on the other. As a result, at the conclusion of the Special National Congress which he convened on 19 November 1963, Sihanouk renounced U.S. aid altogether, apparently to avoid American interference in Khmer domestic affairs.

Two days later, Prince Sihanouk unsuccessfully tried to initiate a limited international conference — with the participation of the U.S., South Vietnam and all countries directly involved in Cambodia's security — designed to guarantee Cambodia's sovereignty within its current national boundaries. His attempt was dictated by the uncertainty of South Vietnam's future and the more disquieting foreign aid that Vietnamese Communists were receiving.

In his reasoning, Prince Sihanouk had said in effect:

Quite frankly, it is not in our interests to deal with the West, which represents the present but not the future. In 10 years time, there will probably be in Thailand, which always responds to the dominant wind, a pro-Chinese neutralist government, and South Vietnam will certainly be governed by Ho Chi Minh or his successor. Our interests are served by dealing with the camp that one day will dominate the whole of Asia — and by coming to terms before its victory — in order to obtain the best terms possible.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the fact that Prince Sihanouk saw his real enemies to be the Communists, his change of policy, and especially his derogatory remarks about the U.S. exasperated the U.S. government to the point that one day Secretary Dean Rusk reportedly summoned the Cambodian ambassador to his office and told him, "Mr. Ambassador, you've got to remember that small countries are not the only ones capable of outrage. Big countries can get mad too."

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<sup>2</sup>Leifer, Michael, Cambodia, The Search for Security, New York, F. A. Praeger, 1967.

Since the U.S. had not supported a conference such as the one suggested by Sihanouk, the prince, it was reported, authorized a popular demonstration in March 1964 during which the U.S. and British embassies in Phnom Penh were seriously damaged.

During his visit to Peking in September 1964, Sihanouk met with Pham Van Dong, North Vietnam's prime minister, and asked him to recognize Cambodia's territorial integrity. Dodging the issue, Dong in his turn asked Sihanouk to refer to the National Liberation Front (NLF) which could represent South Vietnam in this matter.

In December 1964, American and Cambodian officials met in New Delhi, through the good offices of the Indian government. Although very cordial, this encounter failed to improve the already tense relations between Cambodia and the U.S.

In early 1965, Great Britain and the U.S. finally decided on an international conference to guarantee Cambodia's national boundaries, in an apparent effort to slow Cambodia's slide toward Communism. Unfortunately, this was too late because Sihanouk, who was now firmly on Peking's side, insisted that the NLF represent South Vietnam in this conference. Obviously, this was unacceptable to the western powers. And so, a further step had been taken, and on 3 May 1965, Sihanouk severed diplomatic relations with Washington.<sup>3</sup>

In this period of Sihanouk's very active political maneuvering, during which he sought to keep in line with current international trends, in order to ultimately align Cambodia on the Communist side, several military events occurred in this part of South East Asia, particularly in South Vietnam, which seemed to justify Sihanouk's attitude if a parallel is drawn between them and the actions he had taken.

By that time, the very famous Ho Chi Minh Trail, which crossed the 18th parallel had already been well established along the entire length

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<sup>3</sup>Sihanouk had broken relations with Thailand in October 1961 and the Republic of Vietnam in August 1963.

of Laos. The rights of the Pathet Lao in this country had been recognized since the 1962 Geneva Conference. In South Vietnam, the VC/NVA presence, which had caused serious turmoil, barely kept under control by the government, continued to increase and expand its influence in most provinces. The enemy's spectacular show of force and capabilities during the Tet offensive of February 1968 in Saigon City itself, was, to the Khmer, proof that he already had the very heart of this country under siege. All of these events tended to confirm Sihanouk's thesis as to South Vietnam's fate in the first place and by way of Cambodia, that of the Indochinese peninsula in general.

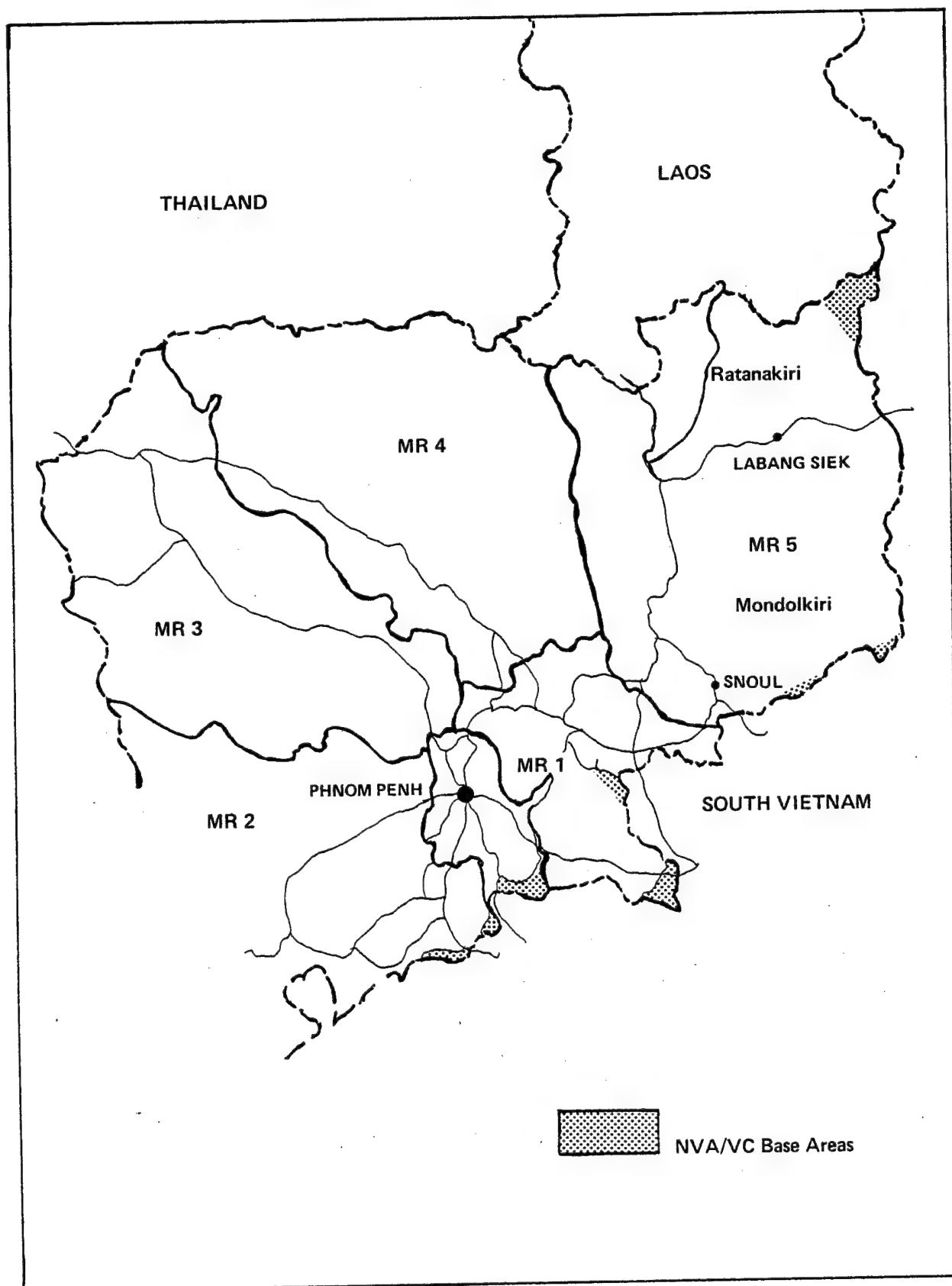
One might say, therefore, that this increasingly worsening military situation in favor of the enemy, coupled with difficulties, and misunderstandings between Phnom Penh and the Western powers, edged Sihanouk further into the adversary's camp in a decisive manner. During this same period, the Communist devoted all of their efforts to winning the esteem and trust of this prince who, it was well understood, was far from desiring a fate such as President Ngo Dinh Diem's.

#### *Communist Use of Cambodian Territory*

As a matter of fact, Communist forces began, as early as 1962, to infiltrate into the northern and eastern border areas of Cambodia, particularly in Stung Treng, Ratanakiri, Kratie, Prey Veng, Svay Rieng, Takeo and Kampot. By 1969, these infiltrated forces were estimated at 50,000 men installed in "sanctuaries" whose importance varied from a simple transit center to all types of bases, having complete military, logistic, and rest facilities, such as the bases in Ratanakiri, Mondolkiri, and Snoul. (*Map 25*)

Because of his "double game," Prince Sihanouk simply omitted, in all of his public statements, references to the existence of these infiltrations, and most particularly, the sanctuaries. He did this apparently to cover up his complicity with North Vietnam and the Viet Cong

Map 25 — Cambodian Government Information on Locations  
of Principal NVA/VC Base Areas in Cambodia in 1969



on the one hand, and to reject the pretexts of "enemy pursuit" by U.S. and South Vietnam forces on the other.

At the same time, however, Sihanouk saw a real Communist danger in his own back yard because, while trying to remain on good terms with China and the NLF, he also decreed a merciless hunt for Khmer Communists. In January 1962, for example, Nong Suon, a Vietnamese-trained Khmer Communist leader, was arrested along with 13 other members of his gang. All were tried by a military tribunal, and imprisoned.

In early 1969, however, the NVA/VC troops, by then solidly installed in their sanctuaries, began to exert pressure on the civilian population around them, while conducting subversive activities against the Cambodian government. Skirmishes with local Khmer authorities became increasingly serious and bloody, such as the armed rebellion of Khmer-Loeu (Montagnards) in the Ratanakiri and Mondolkiri area which resulted in the nearly total loss of local Cambodian control over this ethnic group, many among whom later joined the NVA/VC forces, either of their own will or under coercion.

It was this rebellion that induced Sihanouk to admit for the first time in public the threat posed by Communists. In a political speech he delivered at the inauguration of the 27th National Congress, Sihanouk denounced this threat in these terms: "As to infiltrations, control and incitement of a segment of our fellow-countrymen, which are the doing of certain Communist neighbors, as well as the armed rebellion by the traitorous Khmer Communists (in the Pailin region of Battambang Province) they will inevitably result, if they do not stop and recede, in the loss of our independence and neutrality."

By mentioning the loss of neutrality in this statement, perhaps Sihanouk wanted to imply that he would be capable of seeking assistance from a foreign power to counter the Communist intrusion. Diplomatic relations with the U.S. were resumed on 3 June 1969; it was, perhaps, the U.S. that Sihanouk was trying to put into his balance of foreign relations, which had already tilted a little too heavily in favor of the East. Although it fell on deaf ears, this famous declaration could be regarded as a warning intended for the FNL and their protectors.

The incorporation of Cambodia into the Communist supply system kept pace with the development of the flow of VC/NVA infiltration into Cambodia, and the development of political relations between Cambodia and the Provisional Revolutionary (Viet Cong) Government (PRG).

From the Communist view point, the Ho Chi Minh Trail constituted in fact the only strategic route leading south. Under constant surveillance and continuous bombings by the USAF and VNAF, this route did not lend itself easily to the transportation of the heavy equipment and materiel which were required for NVA troops in the south. If this route were completely interdicted by U.S. and RVN forces, it would be a real disaster for North Vietnam and the Viet Cong. Therefore, it was mandatory for the enemy to find an alternate to this vital lifeline, which would be less vulnerable to USAF/VNAF bombings. This explained why he turned toward Cambodia, or more particularly, toward its seaport of Kompong Som. It was a most propitious time for the enemy's diplomatic maneuvers. Since Sihanouk had repudiated U.S. aid, Communist countries, and especially Red China were rushing in to fill this void. It became just a matter of increasing the volume of aid shipments to Cambodia, then routing the surplus to NVA/VC forces; the process passed almost undetected. This alternate route was deemed even more reliable because it was not exposed to the risks of U.S. bombings.

In the meantime, Sihanouk seemed to have serious doubts about the viability of Cambodia and his regime. On the one hand he was harassed by unending border violations, the result of the pursuit of Communist forces from South Vietnam into Cambodia; on the other hand, he was worried by the subversive maneuvers of the NVA/VC and the local Khmer Communists. He launched therefore "an appeal for the recognition and respect of Cambodia's territorial integrity within its present boundaries."

To this appeal, only Nguyen Huu Tho, president of the NLF, and Pham Van Dong, North Vietnam's prime minister responded favorably by their letters of 6 and 8 June 1967 respectively. The U.S. took nearly two years to respond, until 15 April 1969. All this resulted in a further consolidation of relations between Cambodia and the enemy which prompted

Sihanouk on 13 June 1969 to extend formal recognition to the Provisional Revolutionary Government (PRG) of South Vietnam, created just 12 days earlier.

The first formal cooperation agreement between Cambodia and the PRG was concluded soon after Nguyen Tan Phat, PRG prime minister, paid a 6-day official visit to Phnom Penh on 29 June 1969. Designated "Trade and Payment Agreement", it was signed in Phnom Penh on 25 September 1969. Thus were formalized the illegal activities that Prince Sihanouk had already authorized for several years. The seaport of Kompong Som was now wide open to receive shipments of supplies intended for NVA/VC troops.

These supplies were subsequently moved by truck to their destinations via Route No. 4. Unloading and transportation operations were the exclusive activities of a certain Hak Ly who owned about 200 cargo trucks. From Kompong Som to Kompong Speu or Phnom Penh, the cargos were carried on trucks rented by Hak Ly. Then from these places to final destination, the transportation was provided by Hak Ly's own trucks, which usually unloaded at Snoul and Mimot.

To rid himself of troublesome witnesses, Sihanouk ordered a black-listing of undesirable foreign correspondents, especially those of the Free World. Finally, citing financial difficulties and criticizing its inactivity, Sihanouk terminated the mandate of the International Control Commission (ICC) on 6 October 1969. On his official request, all members of this international organization left Cambodia by the end of the year.

Thus it was accomplished that the Communists, by painstaking preparation, took advantage of the political uncertainties in that part of the world, and of the dilemma of Sihanouk.

What was the attitude of the Cambodian people toward this political change by Sihanouk? Generally speaking, there were two constrasting schools of thought: the corrupt who were partisan and enthusiastic; and the uncorrupt, who were disquieted.

The first category consisted of courtiers and businessmen to whom this new kind of business had brought substantial and significant profits.

The second category was mostly made up of intellectuals who found this new game risky. While the dissidents did not wholly approve of Sihanouk, with regard to his cooperation with North Vietnam and the Viet Cong, their manifestations were not vocal either, and one might think that they were indifferent. But on examination it could be seen that their silence was justified by the facts described below.

In the first place, Cambodia was the least endowed country in terms of materiel assets and particularly military equipment as compared to its eastern or western neighbors. This was perhaps a result of its desire to stay away from either sphere of influence. Because of its neutral stance, Cambodia did not have much attraction for rich and powerful countries, especially since its only resources came from agricultural products. Elsewhere in the world, industrial powers seemed always attracted by countries with rich underground resources. Cambodia, therefore, had been forsaken for a long time; it was almost completely ignored.

Although Cambodia had received some foreign aid from certain friendly countries of the West since 1954, this aid was only dispensed at a trickling rate after lengthy and complicated procedures. With the exception of rubber production, a French concession which was rather obsolescent, industry was non-existent, being at the level of handicraft and cottage enterprise.

From his relations with the Communists, Sihanouk was therefore able to obtain at least something with which to equip his country, such as the Khmer-Russian Hospital, the Institute of Technology, cement, paper, glass and plywood production plants and some military equipment as well. With regard to military aid, Cambodia usually received a quota which was allotted in each cargo shipment unloaded at Kompong Som.

All this largely explained the passivity and silence of dissident intellectuals.

### *The Royal Khmer Armed Forces*

Prior to March 1970, the Royal Khmer Armed Forces (Forces Armees Royales Khmeres - FARK) were just a small military organization whose strength



did not even reach the authorized ceiling of 35,000 men; they were distributed among three services; the Royal Khmer Army, the Royal Khmer Air Force and the Royal Khmer Navy, all under the command of a Commander-in-Chief.<sup>4</sup>

The following review shows that at that time, the FARK were insignificant as compared to NVA and VC forces, and there were several reasons for this.

Prior to the Geneva Accords of 1954, it was a fact that Cambodia received military aid from France. During that period, therefore, the FARK were equipped with French materiel. The French also provided training for all FARK cadres, most of whom were even sent to France for advanced courses. In addition, under the guidance of French advisers, the FARK were structurally similar to a miniature French Army. France, which at that time had just emerged from the First Indochina war, did not have enough resources to make the FARK a strong and modern military force. This French policy was also partly justified by the fact that according to the 1954 Geneva Accords, Cambodia was not supposed to make war. The FARK were thus organized and equipped somewhat in a pre-WWII style, a condition which obtained as late as 1954.

Then came the U.S. and its more diversified aid, which included military assistance. The FARK were now subjected to transformation because, with new American equipment, the Command attempted to change the organization of the armed forces. Unfortunately, the quantity of equipment provided by the U.S. was not enough to allow the modernization of the RKAF. And when Sihanouk renounced to U.S. aid together in November 1963, the RKAF found themselves midway toward modernization. It was then that there surfaced the first difficulties resulting from the disparity of equipment and material in use — French and American.

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<sup>4</sup>The two acronyms used in this monograph to designate the Cambodian armed forces are based on both Cambodian usage and U.S. reporting practices. FARK stands for Forces Armées Royales Khmères, the official French name for Khmer forces during the Sihanouk period. FANK stands for Forces Armées Nationales Khmères, the official French name used by the Cambodians after 18 March 1970. It was standard U.S. reporting procedure, both before and after the departure of Sihanouk, to use FARK or FANK; no acronym based on an English translation (as in the case of RVNAF for Vietnamese forces) was ever developed to refer to the entire armed forces of Cambodia.

After the rupture of relations with the U.S., the only countries that gave Cambodia military assistance were France (which continued to dispense it at a trickle) and, especially, those of the Communist Bloc, first the Soviet Union and then China. The net result of this new assistance was a further aggravation of the existing difficulties, for the FARK now had to contend with three different types of materiel and equipment: French, American and Communist. It goes without saying that the FARK encountered no end of problems. The divergence of its materiel, affected the training of combat and technical personnel, maintenance and especially the supply of spare parts and ammunition.

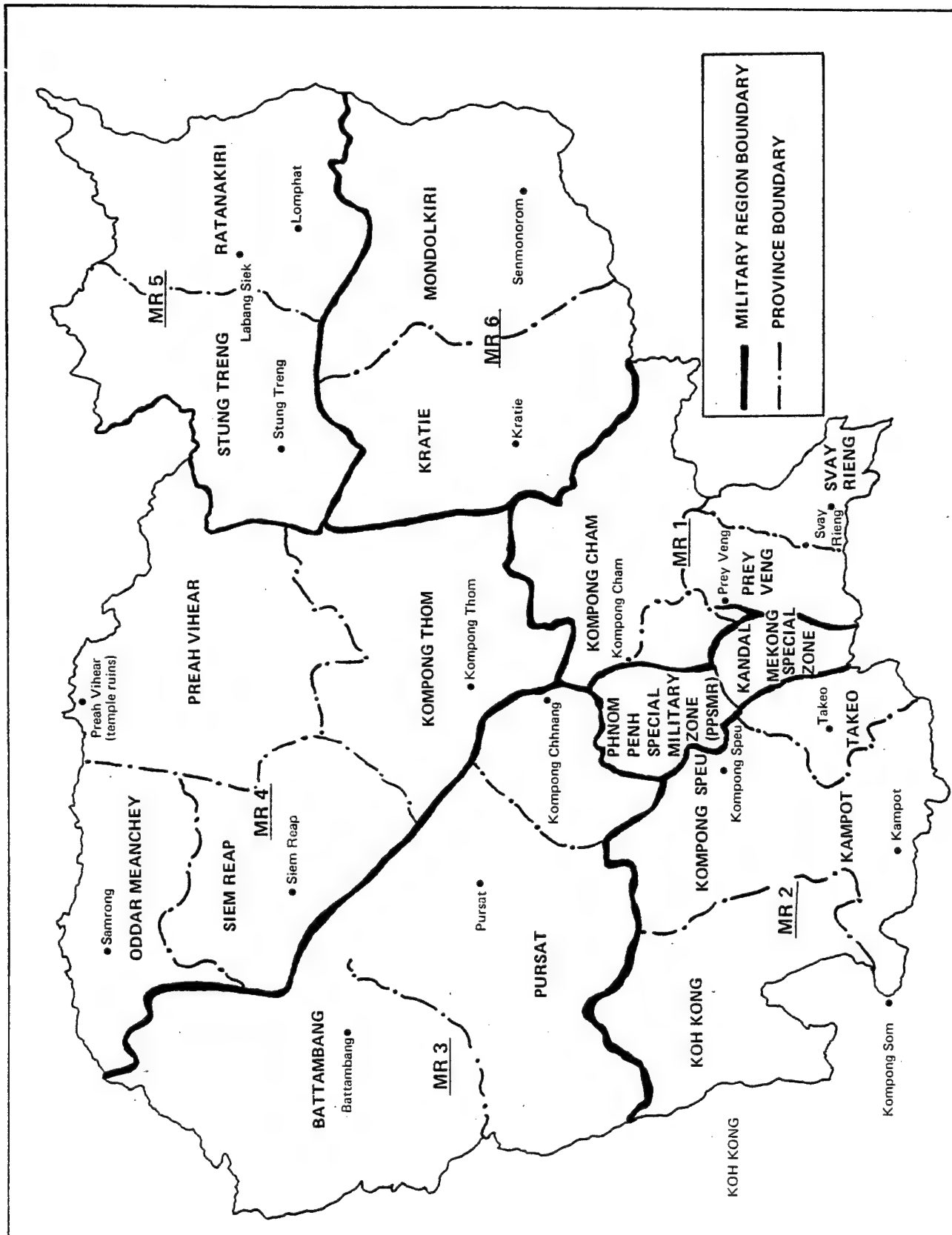
All this explained why the FARK were never able to achieve the standardization of their units in order to become a strong and modern military force. Consequently, the primary mission of the FARK remained just "territorial, - hence static - defense." The Royal Khmer Army, which was the largest of the three services in terms of personnel and materiels, was thus assigned this responsibility.

Army units were deployed over six military regions (MR), each of them encompassing from two to five military subdivisions whose limits were essentially the territorial boundaries of provinces: (Map 26)

	<u>Headquarters located in:</u>	<u>Provinces Making up Military Region</u>
1st MR:	Kompong Cham	Kompong Cham, Prey Veng, Svay Rieng and Kandal
2d MR:	Kompong Speu	Kompong Speu, Kampot, Takeo, Kompong Som and Koh Kong
3d MR:	Battambang	Battambang, Kompong Chhnang, Pursat
4th MR:	Siem Reap	Siem Reap, Kompong Thom, Oddar Meanchay, Preah Vihear
5th MR:	Stung Treng	Stung Treng, Ratanakiri
6th MR:	Kratie	(created in 1969) Kratie, Mondolkiri

In general, the MR commander commanded the infantry battalions and combat support companies deployed in his MR. As to technical service

Map 26 -- The Military Regions of the Khmer Armed Forces in 1971



detachments, which were under the control of their parent Service Directorates, they were subordinate to the Military Region commander for operational control only. In addition to the FARK units and service detachments, the MR commander could in case of need also employ Royal Police forces which were subordinate to the local province governor. There was also a special zone around the capital having the status of a military region, and shortly after the start of the war a special defense zone for the Mekong River between the capital and the RVN border was established.

In early 1970, a majority of the approximately 35 battalions of combat ground forces were concentrated in the northeast and around the capital. (Map 27) General reserve forces consisted only of two light infantry battalions, and the combat support battalions (Signal, Engineer, Armor, Artillery).

The Royal Air Force had a strength of 1,250 men, composed in great majority of flight crews (pilots, flight engineers, radio operators and flight mechanics) and aviation technicians. Its only airbase at Pochentong was placed under the control of the Commander-in Chief. Because of its low strength and limited flying assets, the Air Force was far from being able to accomplish its primary mission which was to defend the national airspace. Although there were several airstrips other than Pochentong, they were only used temporarily as emergency landing strips and never as secondary airbases. Therefore, the Air Force was merely considered a combat support arm which provided air transport services to infantry units and occasionally close air support to combat operations.

The Royal Khmer Navy, whose strength was similar to that of the Air Force, had a river base at Chruai Changwar (Phnom Penh) and a naval base at Ream. As was the case with the Air Force, the Navy did not have very great capability. There was one marine company in the Navy. Most naval activity was confined to the Bassac River, the Mekong, and the Tonle Sap in the vicinity of the Great Lake. As far as naval missions on the high sea were concerned, the Navy was capable only of routine coastal patrols.

[illegible]

Throughout its years of independence since 1953 the Royal Khmer Armed Forces were never organized and were never trained for the purpose of aggression; they were only designed to defend the national territory. Perhaps, because of this reason, furthermore aggravated by a lack of concern or even neglect, the FARK were not prepared for war on 18 March 1970.

As a result, the majority of officers and non-commissioned officers, who for several years had helplessly witnessed the NVA/VC invasion of Cambodian territory, displayed rather low morale because they already perceived the imminent danger of the enemy threat. This low morale was all the more marked due to the fact that all FARK personnel were volunteers; all were concerned for the country's survival.

Professionally, as has been said, the FARK were very ill-prepared for the war. The main reasons for this unpreparedness were more political than technical.

First, the FARK had been activated with the material and technical assistance of the French government, on which they depended almost entirely from the beginning. With the advent of U.S. assistance, they underwent a first transformation, and when this assistance was refused, a second transformation. Each transformation naturally required the training of personnel but the time in-between was too short for training to progress to an advanced level. The end result of these transformations was that the FARK suffered from a lack of cohesiveness within their ranks, a legacy of widely diverging military systems (French, American, and Russian-Chinese).

Second, perhaps because of a lack of funds or more likely, because of an overconfidence in the 1954 Geneva Accords, no significant effort had been expended to train either officers or soldiers. By overconfidence in the 1954 Geneva Accords, I refer to the reliance which Cambodia, because of her small size, always placed on international bodies and international opinion in order to maintain her security. The 1954 accords were a great diplomatic victory for Cambodia, and gave rise to high optimism on our part; in retrospect, this optimism was unfounded. For the entire

Army, there were only four training facilities: the Khmer Military Academy for officers, a training center at Pursat for non-commissioned officers; another one at Romeas for enlisted men above the rank of private; and, an armor training center for officers and non-commissioned officers at Kompong Chhnang.

Third, in addition to all these difficulties and at a time when the FARK should have been worrying about its lack of personnel and training (in order to prepare for an enemy already in place) Sihanouk made an even greater error by converting the FARK from an Army to a public works organization. During that time, Cambodian soldiers learned how to handle shovels and axes instead of weapons.

Finally, because Cambodia had enjoyed relative peace since 1954 on the one hand and because of the small size of its armed forces on the other, all FARK units were assigned to essentially static defense missions.

As for equipment and materiel, they were war-worn and obsolescent, being all of World War II vintage and left by French forces when they were withdrawn from Cambodia. Only the Royal Khmer Air Force had the benefit of relatively modern equipment. But even this failed to make it a modern air force, capable of carrying out its true mission. With the exception of the MIG-17F, a gift from Soviet Russia and the People's Republic of China (1961), all aircraft belonging to the Air Force were designed solely for training and short transport, this despite the fact that Cambodian flight crews, being trained overseas, were all qualified for more modern aircraft. As to the Khmer Navy, it did not fare any better than its sister services. Equipped with small boats and ships all lightly armed, the Navy did not even dare to leave the confines of coastal waters and take to the high seas.

In conclusion, it was clear that on 18 March 1970, the FARK were distinctly below acceptable levels for a modern military force. Their equipment was not only obsolescent but also hideously disparate, coming chiefly from the surplus of others. In a certain sense, the FARK depots were not unlike junk yards where everyone had conveniently dumped whatever he found of no further use.

*Attacks by NVA/VC Forces Against Cambodia After 18 March 1970*

Sihanouk was stripped of his powers as Chief of State on 18 March 1970. It was a legal action decided unanimously by members of both legislative chambers, who, in fact, had been pushed toward this action by the increasing threat posed by NVA/VC forces in Cambodia.

An unsuccessful attempt to deal with the NVA/VC had been made on 24 May 1969 when Prime Minister Lon Nol met officially for the first time with North Vietnam's representative, Nguyen Thuong, and the NLF delegate, Nguyen Van Hieu. The purpose of this meeting was to request the NVA/VC to desist from committing violations against Cambodian territory, violations which were frequent and becoming more and more serious. No positive result was obtained from this meeting; the enemy simply ignored Cambodia's request.

Since NVA/VC forces continued to exert pressure on the local Khmer population, the inhabitants of Svay Rieng began in early March 1970 to manifest their dissatisfaction toward the intruders. These popular manifestations met with retaliations from the enemy and resulted in casualties. This in turn provoked a widespread feeling of discontent among the population which culminated in destructive rampages against the North Vietnamese and PRG embassies in Phnom Penh on 11 and 12 March 1970.

Amidst the gravity of this explosive situation, which pitted the Khmer population against the NVA/VC, the Cambodian government, by a diplomatic note of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, formally requested the NVA/VC to withdraw all of their troops from Cambodian territory. The deadline set was dusk 15 March 1970.

Once more, the NVA/VC did nothing to comply with the Cambodian request. NVA/VC representatives were therefore invited to participate in a working session with staff members of the Khmer Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 16 March 1970. Nothing positive was achieved, however. The NVA/VC representatives not only cited reasons of their own for non-compliance with the Cambodian request; they also asked in return that



their governments be paid for damages caused to their embassies. Thus ended the working session which was also the last meeting between the Cambodian government and the NVA/VC.

On 25 March 1970, however, the Polish Embassy sent a memorandum to the Cambodian Ministry of Foreign Affairs informing the latter among other things, of the availability of good office's concerning the evacuation of all North Vietnamese and PRG embassy personnel. On 27 March 1970, all North Vietnamese and PRG embassy personnel took off by ICC aircraft for Hanoi. This departure marked the end of diplomatic relations between Cambodia and North Vietnam and the PRG.

Well before the enemy launched attacks against Cambodia, he had initiated a rumor campaign to create a feeling of insecurity and internal crisis. This was to divide governmental forces in the first place, and then to isolate the government from the popular support; finally it would lead both domestic and world opinion to believe that the war in Cambodia had been staged by Sihanouk followers against the new regime — in other words, that this war was only a civil war.

All of this deception was but common Communist fare to those who were familiar with Communist strategy in Asia. However, to those ill-informed of this Communist practice, as was the case with several foreign observers, the enemy bait was palatable and for a certain time, questions arose as to whether or not Cambodian protests against the armed and overt aggression by NVA/VC forces were in fact justified. How perfect the Communist screenplay was!

In fact, under the pretext of helping Sihanouk return to power, an eventuality rather warmly welcomed by the majority of illiterate (ill-informed common people who lived far from the nation's capital) the enemy was able to incite the civilian population to demonstrate against the legal government. On 26 March 1970, several bloody demonstrations erupted in the city of Kompong Cham; these were quelled only by the intervention of Khmer troops.

On 27 March 1970, a second demonstration, more violent still, took place in Kompong Cham; but this time the army was forced to open fire. In Takeo, similar demonstrations also compelled the Khmer army to intervene.

The same thing happened to the inhabitants of Prey Veng who were stopped by Khmer troops only 15 kilometers from Phnom Penh.

The question on the minds of many people at that time was whether or not these demonstrations had been organized by Sihanouk followers. To clarify the question, I think we should point out the fact that in its interventions, the Khmer forces had detained several NVA/VC cadre among the demonstrators; there was no doubt that it was they who had orchestrated the entire show. We may deduct with reasonable certainty that these cadres were members of the Vietnamese Communist infrastructure because all of these demonstrations were staged in provinces adjacent to NVA/VC sanctuaries.

Following this stage play, the NVA/VC suddenly began on 29 March 1970 their overt aggression against Cambodia. These enemy forces were known to be NVA/VC regular units whose total strength was estimated at between 45,000 and 60,000. Meanwhile, the defending forces, our FANK, numbered merely 35,000.<sup>5</sup>

It was a very sudden and widespread attack conducted along the eastern and southeastern boundaries and coming from the sanctuary areas. The suddenness of these attacks did not cause much of a surprise to the FANK command because it had expected them all along. But the time available for defense preparations was so short (just two days, from 27 to 29 March) that many isolated and weakly manned outposts succumbed under the violence of the first enemy assaults. From the very first days, therefore, the FANK was driven back by the enemy push. In rapid succession, the following towns and cities fell into enemy hands:

In MR-1: Snoul, Chup, Mimot, Krek, Saang, Koh Tham

In MR-2: Kompong Trach

In MR-5: Strung Treng (which had been heavily threatened)

In MR-6: Mondulkiri, Kratie City

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<sup>5</sup> Note the change from FARK to FANK following the change in Government on 18 March 1970.

During the month of August 1970, the situation stabilized a little but the enemy did not relent his push. The FANK were found then holding a shrinking area which extended on both sides of the Bassac River and the Tonle Sap Great Lake from the northwest to the southeast. (Map 28)

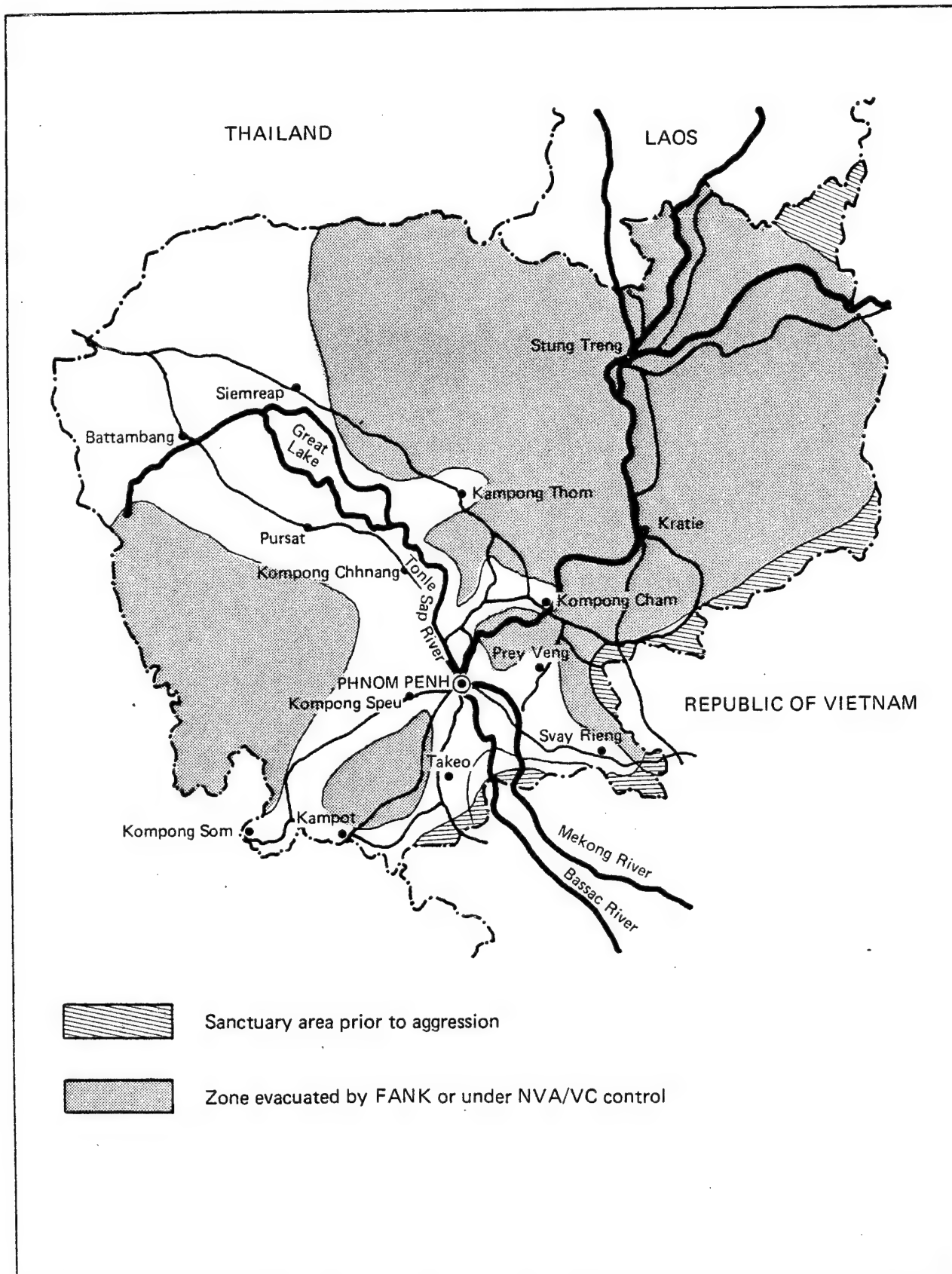
*Khmer Cooperation with the RVN and U.S.  
Prior to the Cambodian Incursion*

Immediately after the armed aggression by NVA/VC forces, which was launched against Cambodia from their sanctuaries along the South Vietnamese border, the Khmer Republic government made countless appeals to the United Nations (UN) Security Council for an end to that aggression. Instead of taking action on the Cambodian request, this international organ (the UN Security Council) merely replied that, in view of Cambodia's being governed by the 1954 Geneva Accords, the Khmer Republic had better apply to the co-chairmen of the 1954 Geneva Conference (Soviet Union and Great Britain).

On 31 March 1970, therefore, in a memorandum addressed to the ambassadors of the Soviet Union and Great Britain, the Cambodian government expressed its deep concern about increasingly flagrant and repeated violations of the 1954 Geneva Accords by the armed forces of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) and those of the PRG of South Vietnam. These forces, the memorandum said, not only refused to withdraw from the Cambodian territory, they were now launching overt attacks against Khmer outposts and defense forces within the Khmer national boundaries. The Cambodian government then demanded the reinstatement of the International Control Commission on an urgent basis.

On 6 April 1970, the United Nations Secretariat announced that Secretary General U Thant had decided "to deal with the authorities who effectively controlled the situation in Cambodia," in other words, with the Phnom Penh government and not with the former Chief of State. This first and only positive response by the UN constituted, in effect, an answer to the claims made by Prince Sihanouk who, in a message addressed to His Excellency U Thant, represented himself as the only legal holder of Cambodian authority.

Map 28 — FANK - Held Areas in Cambodia in August 1970



In early April 1970, General Lon Nol twice received very discreet, night visits by Nguyen Cao Ky, South Vietnam's Vice President. Though highly secret, these visits nevertheless can be seen as the first steps toward reestablishing diplomatic relations between South Vietnam and Cambodia on the one hand and toward the initiation of military cooperation and assistance in the face of a common enemy on the other. It is not known exactly how the first of these visits was arranged. Very few people in Phnom Penh knew of them, and they were attended on the Khmer side by General Lon Nol and Prince Sirik Matak only. It is considered possible, however, that General Lon Nol's younger brother Lon Non played a part in the arrangements.<sup>6</sup>

In conjunction with these activities, President Nixon also issued a warning to the enemy when, announcing the next increment of U.S. troop withdrawal from South Vietnam, he referred to the enemy's escalation in Laos and Cambodia and declared on 20 April 1970:

"The enemy would be taking grave risks if they attempted to use American withdrawals to jeopardize remaining U.S. forces in Vietnam by increased military action in Vietnam, in Cambodia, or in Laos; if they were to do so I shall not hesitate to take strong and effective measures to deal with that situation."

Ten days after issuing this warning, President Nixon announced on 30 April 1970 that U.S. forces, in cooperation with the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (RVNAF) were going to launch immediate attacks to destroy enemy sanctuaries along the Khmer-Vietnamese border.

In Phnom Penh, meanwhile, where the U.S. Embassy was headed by Mr. Lloyd M. Rives, Charge d'affaires, assisted by Lt. Colonel Robert H. Riemensnider, Air Attache, the only cooperation activities that took place were exchanges of information concerning the evolution of the military situation. These exchanges were made through daily contacts by the U.S. Air Attache. No concrete action was taken, however, until President Nixon announced the famous Cambodian Incursion.

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<sup>6</sup>At the same time as these contacts, the Cambodian government was also approached by other countries of the Free World, first Thailand, then the Republic of China (Taiwan), followed by South Korea shortly after. All offered to help in some way.

Toward the end of April 1970, simultaneously with an increase in military personnel attached to the U.S. Embassy in Phnom Penh, contacts between the FANK General Staff and the JGS, RVNAF, as well as MACV, became more regular and increasingly solid, even though diplomatic relations were not established between Phnom Penh and Saigon until a month later, on 27 May 1970.

As far as military cooperation between the FANK and the RVNAF and MACV was concerned, it was first made through exchange visits. In the beginning, an official Khmer military delegation was sent to Saigon for a visit to MACV. The purpose of this visit was to exchange views on the military situation in Cambodia and more particularly, to study the procedures of carrying out an operation whose objective was to evacuate Khmer garrisons in MR-5, mainly the garrisons in Ratanakiri Province. This one-day meeting resulted in plans for the evacuation of these garrisons to Pleiku. Because it lacked the means for the operation, the Cambodian government authorized its conduct by U.S.-RVN troops. On the Cambodian side, participation was limited to two liaison officers: the 5th MR commander and a high ranking officer representing the FANK General Staff.

At the same time, the FANK Command authorized the assignment of one RVNAF liaison officer to each Subdivision commander in the 1st and 2d Military Regions. The purpose of this arrangement was to exchange information and coordinate fire support.

In May 1970, a RVN delegation headed by Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky, and including the GVN Minister of Defense, made an official visit to Phnom Penh. At the end of this visit, an agreement was concluded which created a 15-km deep zone on each side of the Cambodian-South Vietnamese border, in which Khmer and Vietnamese military authorities at the Province and District level could operate freely without prior clearance from either government. It was further understood that operations which might require a deeper penetration into Cambodia would be the object of special government agreement. However, the FANK never had the opportunity to make use of this agreement.

In the same spirit of cooperation, the Cambodian government also authorized South Vietnam to establish an operational base at Neak Luong, on the Mekong. This base even received a visit by President Nguyen Van Thieu in June 1970. During this visit, President Thieu met for the first time with H.E. Cheng Heng, then Cambodia's Chief of State, who was accompanied by General Lon Nol and Prince Sisinath Sirik Matak.

While cooperation between military authorities of Cambodia and South Vietnam was becoming closer, the U.S. and FANK strengthened their ties even more by instituting regular Tripartite meetings, initially at MACV headquarters or the JGS in Saigon. Here FANK, RVNAF and MACV delegations met each month. Because of its lack of facilities and material resources, the FANK General Staff was not able to host tripartite meetings until 1972.

The objectives of these tripartite meetings were to: (1) exchange information concerning South Vietnam, Cambodia and a part of Laos; (2) study and plan for current military operations which were to be conducted either by Khmer forces alone or by combined forces FANK-RVNAF) with U.S. air support; (3) study and plan for logistic support, and; (4) study and plan for the training of Khmer military personnel.

In 1970, a liaison office was established by the RVNAF in Phnom Penh, following a parallel agreement to install a similar office by the FANK in Saigon.

As far as air support was concerned, cooperation was equally close. The Khmer Air Force, for example, installed an Air Support Coordination Detachment at the U.S. 7th Air Force TACC in Saigon, another at Tan Chau to accompany river convoys, and a detachment of observer-interpreters at Bien Hoa. In return, the Vietnam Air Force also installed an Air Support Coordination Detachment in Phnom Penh which dealt directly with the FANK General Staff in matters concerning air support. During this period of cooperation, the majority of daylight air support missions, especially reconnaissance support missions, were provided by the U.S. 7th Air Force and the VNAF, both of which also flew night support missions that only they could provide. As to the Khmer Air Force, it was responsible for transport missions within Cambodia and close air support in medium-scale operations.

*The Status of the FANK on 1 May 1970*

Up to the eve of 29 March 1970, when the enemy began his surprise attack, the FANK had not expanded in any significant way. From the very beginning, therefore, they had to defend themselves against an enemy who was clearly superior in strength, much better equipped and more combat-experienced. This accounted for the loss of territory from the first days of attack. Gradually, however, the FANK made significant progress in the implementation of their program of expansion and reinforcement. Tens of thousands of volunteers from all walks of life (peasants, city dwellers, students, and even civil servants) joined the armed forces. They were followed by the reenlistment of retired servicemen who then constituted the cadre of the young republican army. This rally of volunteers, which was so vast and so spontaneous, effectively solved the problem of manpower shortages. But at the same time, it also burdened the FANK command with difficulties in materiel, logistic support (armament, equipment, food, barracks, transportation, etc.), and training. The FANK were experiencing growing pains of crisis proportions. Young men in civilian clothes and sandals were seen riding in civilian trucks and passenger cars to frontline areas as reinforcements. Only 5% of these young recruits had gone through even a few days of basic military training. Nearly all of them went to fight the war with empty hands, armed only with a determination to serve and defend their fatherland.

Not until the first weeks of April 1970 did equipment and weapons begin to arrive. These were Chinese-made weapons that U.S. and RVN forces had captured from the enemy. This worsened the existing disparity of armament in the FANK and complicated the work for logistic services even more. (The AK-47 assault rifle was an exception, since it had been in the FANK inventory in relatively large numbers for several years).

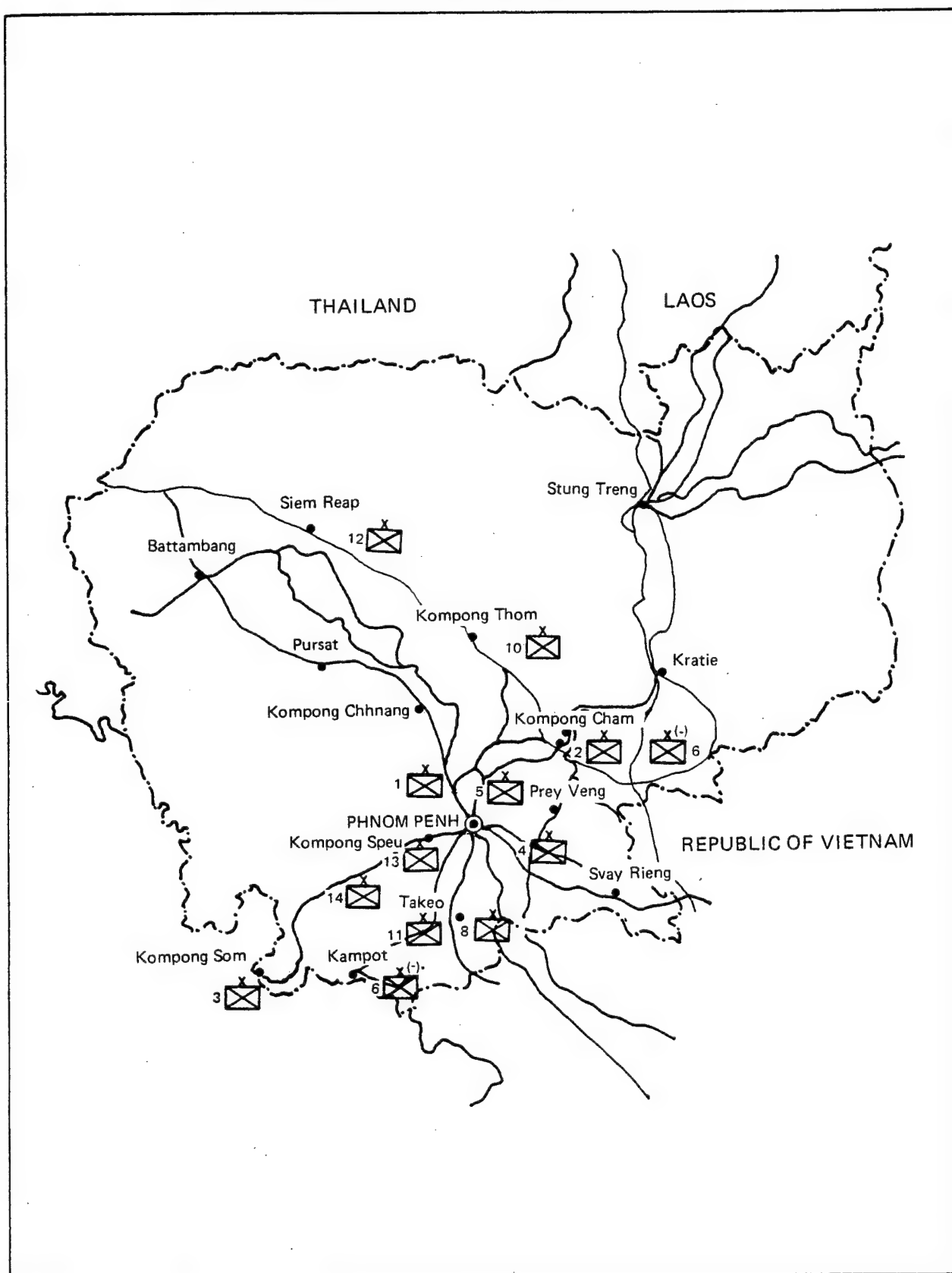
In any event, it was during this month of April 1970 that the emerging FANK took on a new look and their first major units were



established. By 1 May 1970, 12 infantry brigades had been activated and deployed as follows: (Map 29)

- 1st Inf. Brigade: headquartered in Phnom Penh and constituting the general reserve.
- 2d Inf. Brigade: based in Kompong Cham and the main force unit of the 1st MR.
- 3d Inf. Brigade: activated in the 2d MR and based in the Kompong Som area.
- 4th Inf. Brigade: activated in Prey Veng (MR-1). This brigade was assigned the mission of defending the special zone of the Mekong River. It operated in the areas of Prey Veng and Neak Luong.
- 5th Inf. Brigade: composed basically of Muslim Khmers and intended for future deployment to north of Stung. Located in Phnom Penh, it served as a reserve unit.
- 6th Inf. Brigade: also composed basically of Muslim Khmers. Its units operated in the Kampot area (MR-2) and in Kompong Cham (MR-1).
- 8th Inf. Brigade: composed of volunteers from the provinces of Takeo and Kandal. It was based in the border area of Takeo and Chau Doc (MR-2).
- 10th Inf. Brigade: activated in Siem Reap, then deployed to Kompong Thom (MR-4). Its units were stationed in Oudar Meanchey.
- 11th Inf. Brigade: activated with units stationed in Takeo (MR-2) and reinforced with volunteers from Kandal and Takeo. It defended Takeo and Route No. 5.
- 12th Inf. Brigade: activated exclusively with volunteers from Battambang and Siem Reap (MR-4). It defended Siem Riep against the 5th VC Division.
- 13th Inf. Brigade: activated at Kompong Speu (MR-2) during this period, this brigade participated in the operation for the defense of Takeo-Angtasom. Later, it was redeployed permanently to Kompong Speu for the defense and protection of Route No. 4.
- 14th Inf. Brigade: based at Tram Khnar (MR-2) along with elements of the antiaircraft artillery half-brigade. This brigade had been reconstituted after its defeat by enemy forces from Phuoc Long.

Map 29 — Locations of Principal FANK infantry Units on 1 May 1970



### *FANK Activities during the Incursion*

During the period of cross-border operations conducted by U.S.-RVN forces, very little was known by the FANK General Staff except for the fact that these operations were designed to destroy NVA/VC sanctuaries and COSVN headquarters in Cambodia. To my knowledge, only General Lon Nol had been informed to some extent of U.S. intentions concerning these operations. As to the FANK General Staff, the information it obtained was general and sketchy. It only knew that U.S. and RVN forces had been authorized to conduct a military operation across the Cambodian-South Vietnamese border during the period May-June 1970. The FANK had no detail whatsoever concerning the plans of this operation; it did not even know the size of forces committed.

This lack of information extended equally to the results of these operations. No details of the results were ever communicated to the Cambodian government.

The only concrete thing that perhaps resulted from this incursion was that, pending the standardization of armament provided by future U.S.-military assistance, the FANK received a quantity of Chinese weapons and ammunition captured from the enemy. These weapons and ammunition were delivered from Saigon by VNAF aircraft.

Following the incursion, the U.S. Embassy in Phnom Penh was augmented by a new section called Military Equipment Delivery Team Cambodia (MEDTC) whose chief, Brigadier General Mataxis, worked in close cooperation with the FANK General Staff on logistic problems. Meanwhile, U.S. military attaches continued and even increased their contacts with the FANK General Staff on operational matters. It was only then that the U.S. military assistance program began to take shape, a program jointly studied and planned by MEDTC and the FANK General Staff, based on funds allotted by the U.S. toward this end.

However, even before MEDTC was installed in Phnom Penh, the FANK had already received a substantial amount of materiel from the U.S., especially signal equipment for territorial units and air-ground communications. This materiel assistance, which came through South Vietnam,

was the work of the Politico-Military Office (POL/MIL) of the U.S. Embassy in Phnom Penh, created in June 1970 and headed by Mr. Jonathan F. Ladd.

In addition to signal equipment, the FANK also received U.S. weapons which were no longer used by the RVNAF. These weapons enabled the FANK to equip newly activated units. Also, cargo trucks were made available which had been purchased from Australia by the United States.

Meanwhile, tripartite meetings regularly took place with the presence of a representative from POL/MIL until the creation of MEDTC, after which both U.S. offices were represented.

From a purely military viewpoint, therefore, one may say that from 18 March to the end of 1970, liaison among Cambodian, South Vietnamese and U.S. military authorities was effectively established at various echelons of command and in all three services of the FANK.

As far as operational cooperation was concerned, two major periods could be distinguished. The first was the period of cross-border operations (May-June 1970) and the second followed after June 1970, in which only U.S. firepower support was provided for operations, which were either conducted by combined Khmer-RVN forces or by FANK units alone.

During this second period, several combined FANK-RVNAF operations were conducted with the air support provided alternately by the USAF and VNAF. These operations were designed to clear enemy pressure around Kompong Cham and Svay Rieng in MR-1, Takeo and Kompong Speu in MR-2 and to restore security to Route No. 4, leading toward the port of Kompong Som. However, helilift support for the majority of these operations was provided solely by the VNAF, whose assets augmented those of the Khmer Air Force.

#### *FANK-RVNAF Cooperation after U.S. Withdrawal*

Following the U.S. troop withdrawal from South Vietnam, there were two distinct major battle areas in Cambodia. The first coincided with Khmer MR-1, and the second was MR-2.

In MR-1, major combined operations conducted by Khmer and RVN forces took place especially in areas along Route No. 7 and in the Mimot and Krek rubber plantations. These operations were designed to clear enemy pressure which was exerted both on Route 13 near Loc Ninh in South Vietnam and on the plantation areas extending toward Kompong Cham.

In MR-2, two large-scale combined operations were conducted by Khmer and RVN forces to relieve Kompong Speu and clear Route No. 4, following the interdiction of Pich Nil Pass by the enemy. ARVN units which participated in these operations belonged to the RVN IV Corps commanded by Lt. General Ngo Dzu.

During all of these operations, air, firepower and intelligence support were provided by combined activities of the U.S., RVN and Khmer air forces; support in airlift was the responsibility of the VNAF and Khmer Air Force. All missions of direct and close air support were assigned to the Khmer Air Force, while indirect and remote missions were the responsibility of the USAF and VNAF, which had more adequate resources. All reconnaissance and observation support missions were flown by the USAF.

The combined efforts of all three national air forces not only provided support for the majority of major operations, they also contributed to the protection of river convoys on the Mekong River. In this mission, the VNAF would be in charge of support to the limit of the Cambodian border. From there on to Neak Luong, air support would be provided by the USAF in cooperation with the Khmer Air Force. Beyond Neak Luong, air support was the sole responsibility of the Khmer Air Force. Fire coordination was effected through an Air Support Coordination Detachment installed in the convoy CP by the Khmer Air Force.

Direct protection and escort of river convoys by naval ships was also provided by a combination of Khmer and RVN naval resources.

For lack of adequate resources by the Khmer, continuous air support during the hours of darkness was provided by the USAF and VNAF. For this purpose, the VNAF maintained a flight of two AC-119 aircraft at Pochentong Air Base in Phnom Penh.

### *Critical Analysis and Conclusions*

During the first hours of the conflict, the Khmer government, as well as Khmer political and military leaders, entertained the hope of resolving this grave problem by peaceful means, especially those means that could be undertaken by that great international organization, the United Nations. As a full member of the United Nations, Cambodia had in fact hoped that this organization would do for Cambodia what it had done for South Korea and Israel by committing its own security troops for the maintenance of peace. Unfortunately, our hopes did not come true.

Therefore, as soon as President Nixon had announced his decision on 30 April 1970 to commit U.S. combat troops in Cambodia, an intervention which was designed to destroy the war potential of NVA/VC forces installed in Cambodia and undertaken simultaneously with intensive air interdiction activities against the enemy's main supply line, the Ho Chi Minh Trail, there was reason for the Cambodian leadership to feel immediately relieved and content. Indeed we witnessed, in the wake of this intervention, a marked though temporary decrease in combat capabilities on the part of the enemy. Knowing, however, that this important intervention by U.S. forces was both limited in time and scope, the enemy avoided confrontation and was thus able to conserve his main forces while waiting out the deadline for U.S. withdrawal.

If a careful analysis were made of this aspect of the problem and from an enemy viewpoint, one might say that the enemy made a well-calculated move when his forces took the areas east of the Mekong River (Stung Treng, Kratie, Kompong Cham, Prey Veng and Svay Rieng) and used them as sanctuaries, firmly established this time deep in Cambodian territory. For friendly troops no longer occupied this part of Cambodia and in a certain sense intervention operations by U.S. and RVN forces in Cambodia merely pushed these mobile and viable enemy sanctuaries deeper inside this abandoned part of Cambodia.

On the Cambodian side, we observed that these operations consisted of frontal, rather than enveloping maneuvers. This gave the enemy ample

opportunity for seeking refuge deeper inside Cambodia. Therefore, this part of Cambodia was effectively cut off and isolated from the rest of the country. The local population who stayed behind were thus caught in the grip and remained under the total control and domination of the enemy.

Although the U.S. Air Force continued to apply its efforts to this region, enemy forces were nevertheless able to bring in reinforcements, organize themselves and eventually change the outlook of this war of aggression against Cambodia into one of civil war between communist and republican Khmer.

We can conclude as well that because of the differences between the objectives sought by the U.S. and the RVN and those of the Khmer, the critical assessments of this incursion may also differ widely.

If, in fact this operation was conducted solely within the framework of Vietnamization as the U.S. command had intended it, then it might be considered a success, because it largely contributed to the achievement of Vietnamization within the time limits imposed by the U.S. government. On the other hand, the withdrawal of U.S. troops would be possible only if the RVNAF were capable of taking over. It was difficult at the time to tell that the RVNAF had that capability. For one thing, the NVA/VC sanctuaries were solidly anchored along the entire western border of South Vietnam. For another, the armed forces of South Vietnam were compelled to extend themselves precariously in order to fill the voids created by the departure of U.S. combat units.

The last major actions undertaken by U.S. forces across South Vietnam and in Cambodia, particularly as far as the Cambodian Incursion was concerned, provided a feeling of "self-assurance" both for the RVNAF and the FANK. Perhaps they also imparted a certain feeling of moral satisfaction to our American ally who was disengaging himself from a part of the world where he had been involved and had fought for more than 20 years.

As far as the FANK Command was concerned, however, and within the framework of its war efforts against the NVA/VC forces, the destruction or even occupation of that part of Cambodia which was under enemy control, if only done temporarily, did not end the problem for FANK. For,

while these temporary effects were sought by the U.S. command, in view of their absolute necessity for Vietnamization to succeed, their repercussions fell with all their weight onto the FANK which were from the beginning not sufficiently prepared to confront an enemy of this size. To avoid massive bombings by U.S. and RVN forces, the enemy fell back deeper and deeper inside the Cambodian territory. These bombings and attacks by friendly forces also caused the complete evacuation of these areas by the civilian population, into which moved the enemy immediately. The result of all this was that a sizeable part of the Cambodian territory was lost to the enemy.

But if the destruction of these enemy sanctuaries had been followed by the permanent occupation of the recovered territory, it would have been much more beneficial to Cambodia, as well as to South Vietnam because, as we can now see the enemy was able to reconstitute his forces and renew his activities from the destroyed sanctuaries.

In addition, we have also to consider the psychological impact created by this operation which marked the last episode of the presence of U.S. combat troops in South Vietnam. The publicity with which the U.S. disengagement was made largely benefited the enemy, who took advantage of it to sap the morale of the civilian population and troops alike in Cambodia, as well as in South Vietnam. As a result, there was a certain lowering in morale on our side; during the same period, the other side, encouraged by ever increasing support and assistance, became more aggressive and began to prepare for its eventual and final victory.

The U.S. policy of disengagement and the departure of U.S. troops in the midst of this critical period, during which the last decisive card was to be played thus resulted in a void so great on the allied side that neither the FANK nor the RVNAF were ever able to fill it.

This void was all the more aggravated by the most unfortunate Watergate scandal, which considerably weakened the prestige of U.S. executive branch of government vis-a-vis the American public. And the departure of President Nixon from the political scene in a certain sense sealed the fate of Indochina, because the cutbacks in and eventual termination of U.S. military assistance to the Khmer Republic and South Vietnam inevitably resulted in a disequilibrium in the balance of forces.



The final outcome of this long Vietnam war, conforming as it did to the will of the enemy and to the desire of certain responsible parties, became known on 17 April 1975. On that date, Cambodia, which had been dragged into the arena of the Indochinese conflict as the last participant, succumbed as the first victim. This brought in its wake the fall of Saigon and Vientiane, thus closing a long chapter that extended over more than a decade in the political and military history of modern times, a history rich in lessons and also in sufferings.

With the fall of Cambodia there died a millennial civilization and -- irony of fate -- there was reborn in its place a cynical demagoguery. The Khmer Republic had thought to bring Cambodian political institutions up to date by eliminating a monarchy, while at the same time preserving all that was most noble of the long Khmer civilization. The actual results were not only disastrous in terms of human loss, but the so-called "democratic" regime which came to power is more barbaric than any other in our long history - and it happened in this 20th century.

## CHAPTER VIII

### Observations and Conclusions

The Cambodian cross-border operations were the largest ever conducted by the RVNAF. At certain times the RVNAF committed up to 50,000 troops who fought alongside and in full coordination with such U.S. units as the 1st, 25th, 4th Infantry Divisions, the 1st Cavalry Division and the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment. For the RVNAF, this was the first time that our major units had been deployed in such numbers at the same time; the total force committed was equivalent to six divisions, the Airborne Division, the 9th, 21st, 25 (-), 22d (-), 23d (-) Infantry Divisions, five ranger groups (of 3 battalions each), one marine brigade (of three battalions) and nine armored cavalry squadrons, about one-half of the total ARVN armor force. It was also the first time RVNAF major units operated in such numbers as a single maneuver force. Up to the incursion, most of them, until replaced by RF and PF units, had performed only pacification support activities, while U.S. forces played the major combat role.

For the Vietnamese Navy, it was also the largest force assembled up to that time for a single operation. In combined activities with U.S. naval units for the clearing of the Mekong River, the Vietnamese Navy also employed about 70 ships of all tonnages; these operated alongside 30 U.S. naval ships. The VNN also succeeded in evacuating approximately 70,000 Vietnamese residents from Cambodia.

Although forced to fight on unfamiliar terrain, the RVNAF had proved to be thoroughly combat effective, despite initial shortcomings in the coordination of armor and infantry actions. But with these shortcomings remedied the RVNAF truly held the initiative throughout the entire operation.

For the numerous individual operations, all planning and supervision was performed by Vietnamese staffs. Logistic support was also provided by the RVNAF system, with the assistance of U.S. advisers, whose role was primarily that of coordinating and supplying materiel and assets not available to the RVNAF, such as command and gunships, night medevac helicopters and B-52 support.

A remarkable thing about the early cross-border operations was the fact that for the first time in several years RVNAF units went into combat unaccompanied by U.S. advisers. During the combined operations, however, U.S. advisers did accompany ARVN units into Cambodia as far as the 30-km limit. To operate without U.S. advisers was a source of pride for ARVN tactical commanders of battalion level and above. They felt more self-assured of their command abilities and, in fact, they all proved that they could manage by themselves. Not only were they able to solve all problems related to the support of ARVN units, they also effectively maintained liaison and coordination with U.S. support units, a function which heretofore had been performed by U.S. advisers only.

Perhaps as a result of South Vietnamese maturity and combat effectiveness, U.S. advisers were removed from a number of ARVN battalions after the incursion. These units had indeed proved that they were capable of doing without advisers. Therefore, U.S. advisory teams were greatly reduced in certain ARVN units and in some instances, they were replaced by liaison teams. For ARVN units with missions to be carried out within well-defined time limits and requiring the support and assistance of U.S. combat support assets, the presence of U.S. advisers was still necessary because they could obtain fire support, medevac helicopters and resupplies more rapidly and in a more reliable manner.

The RVNAF, not constrained by time or space during the cross-border operations, and relying on the support provided by U.S. forces, advanced, on occasion, up to 60 km inside Cambodia. (As when they helped to relieve Kompong Cham, Kompong Speu, and the Pich Nil Pass on Route 4.)

On the other hand the effectiveness of U.S. forces in Cambodia was constrained both by time and space. They were not allowed to advance

deeper than 30 km into Cambodia and they were also compelled to withdraw by 2400 hours on 30 June 1970. One of the factors limiting the freedom of President Nixon to extend these limits on U.S. operations in Cambodia was, doubtless, the public opposition to the U.S. combat role in Cambodia. Several demonstrations took place in the U.S. just a few days after U.S. troops went into Cambodia. Organized and instigated by the anti-war movement, these demonstrations vocally and even violently opposed the U.S. incursion in Cambodia. At Kent State University, for example, students clashed with U.S. National Guard troops, resulting in four students dead and twelve others wounded. The enemy no doubt knew how to exploit this situation. His main force units withdrew beyond the 30 km limit and avoided contact with U.S. forces in order to conserve their force. Their goal was to wait out the U.S. incursion and resume activities immediately after U.S. troops had been withdrawn. As a result, when they progressed into Cambodia, U.S. and RVNAF units made contact with only small enemy forces, mostly logistic or support elements whose mission it was to harass and delay the advance of our troops.

I believe that if U.S. units had been authorized more time and more space to maneuver, enemy main force units would not have been able to hide and would have sustained serious losses in men and supplies to U.S. air and artillery firepower.

#### *General Results*

The Cambodian Incursion of 1970 inflicted severe losses on the enemy, both in human life and in war materiel. His base areas and storage-points along the Cambodian border were practically paralyzed. It was the estimate of the JGS, supported by HQ MACV, that it would take the enemy a minimum of 6 to 9 months to reorganize his logistic installations and partially restock them.

Friendly forces captured from the enemy a total of 22,892 individual weapons, armament for the equivalent of 54 enemy main force battalions

of 450 men each. The number of crew-served weapons captured amounted to 2,509, enough to equip 27 infantry battalions. In addition, friendly forces also captured and destroyed approximately 2,500 tons of assorted ammunition, enough to sustain enemy forces oriented against MR 3 and MR 4 in combat for 9 to 12 months; it was equivalent to the amount of ammunition that these enemy forces had expended during the previous year. NVA forces would also run into serious shortages in food because approximately 14,046,000 lbs of rice, among other foodstuff, had either been seized or destroyed. It was estimated that this amount of rice could feed enemy forces for a period from 4 to 6 months. In the huge amount of ammunition seized by our forces, there were in excess of 143,000 rounds of mortar, rocket, and recoilless rifle. Based on knowledge of past enemy consumption, these rounds were the equivalent of what had been used by the enemy during the past 14 months in attacks-by-fire against our installations and bases. Another significant enemy loss was our capture or destruction of 435 enemy vehicles of all types.

Although the enemy could always procure rice from local sources, either in Cambodia or just across the border in South Vietnam, he could not do the same as far as ammunition and equipment were concerned. With the port at Kompong Som now closed, these latter items would, in the future have to come down the Ho Chi Minh trail, a development which would significantly inhibit the enemy's ability to conduct combat operations in South Vietnam, especially in Military Regions 3 and 4.

While the incursion's primary objective was the destruction of enemy bases and supplies, the enemy also incurred considerable casualties in manpower. A total of 11,349 enemy troops were killed and another 2,328 were made prisoners or rallied to our side.<sup>1</sup> These casualties

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<sup>1</sup>Enemy loss figures and examples of impact are taken from President Nixon's report (cited in Chapter III, footnote 2) and are cumulative through 29 June 1970.

alone equalled the strength of an enemy division. To replace these losses, it was the estimate of the JGS, supported by HQ MACV, that it would take the enemy at least 4 to 6 months to recruit and train new troops.

Among the enemy troops and cadres who rallied to our side, the most important was Lt. Colonel Nguyen Thanh, deputy commander of the enemy 2d Subregion, who surrendered in Tay Ninh on 20 May 1970. He disclosed that the U.S.-RVN cross-border operation had completely upset enemy plans to occupy Kompong Cham and Svay Rieng by 1 May 1970 and then assemble all transportation means locally available to rapidly move the NVA 7th and 9th Divisions to Phnom Penh which they were to occupy by 3 May. Once in control of the Cambodian capital, the enemy planned to launch a "high point" against Saigon with an intensity comparable to the 1968 Tet Offensive. But all of these plans were pre-empted by our incursion into Cambodia.

In addition to enemy losses inflicted by our ground combat units, we must also include those inflicted by U.S. tactical air and B-52's. During the operation, U.S. tactical air flew a total of 6,017 combat support missions or an average of 210 missions per day (168 preplanned and 42 on call). Also, during the period of combined U.S.-RVN operations in Cambodia, there was a total of 21 "Commando Vaults" or 15,000-lb bombs dropped from C-130's to clear landing zones and, in a few cases, against special targets such as supply points and vehicle parks. These Commando Vault missions were conducted against Base Area 354 and the Fishhook. The results obtained from U.S. tactical air missions during the incursion were reported as: 520 enemy troops killed, 567 secondary explosions, 4,571 enemy installations, 52 vehicles of all types, 30 bridges and approximately 268 tons of rice destroyed. U.S. gunships (AC-119 "Stingrays," and AC-120 "Specters," and AC-130 flareships) expended a total of 1.5 million rounds of ammunition with their 8-barrel "Gatling" machineguns and 8,600 flares in support of infantry troops. Every night, an average of three gunships provided continuous coverage from the air.

B-52's also played an important role in the destruction of enemy installations and supply points. During the period 24 April to 30 June 1970, they flew 186 support missions, mostly concentrating on the Fishhook area and Base Areas 352 and 353 where COSVN headquarters and several important enemy supply storages were reportedly located. Even prior to the operation, 36 B-52 missions had been directed against these areas, facilitating penetration and subsequent exploitation by friendly troops. The most significant of all these B-52 missions was one conducted on 11 May against a target northwest of Mimot. Friendly troops who penetrated the target area to assess bomb damage found 101 enemy bodies. Later, when the operation had been terminated, intelligence reports indicated that this B-52 mission had struck an underground shelter housing part of COSVN headquarters. The role played by B-52's was also vital in covering the safe withdrawal of friendly troops from this area. 36 B-52 missions struck an area northwest of Base Areas 351, 352, and 353, preventing enemy forces from pursuing our troops. Again, when friendly forces had withdrawn from the Fishhook area, B-52's concentrated their strikes against suspected targets that our troops had not searched. The results obtained from B-52 missions were reported to include: 239 enemy killed, 329 secondary explosions, 2,259 installations and underground shelters, destroyed or damaged, and 39 anti-aircraft weapons destroyed.

A comparison of enemy and friendly losses after the operation shows that our losses amounted to only 1/11 of those of the enemy. Most of our casualties were caused by mines and booby traps when our forces advanced into enemy base areas. The enemy was, of course, familiar with these areas since they had made use of them for a long time. But these areas were totally unfamiliar to our troops, which accounted for the casualties to our forces by mines and booby traps.

One remarkable result of the incursion was that COSVN headquarters had to displace west of the Mekong River for security. During this displacement, all of its radio networks ceased to operate and no orders, therefore, were issued to subordinate enemy units. Perhaps as a result

of this temporary disability, enemy forces were confused as to what to do in the face of our advance. Consequently, in the absence of COSVN orders, these enemy units were compelled to avoid contact, disperse themselves and conserve their force. They rarely reacted forcefully toward our units. When, a short time later, COSVN radio networks did become active again their signal level was much weaker and transmissions not as frequent as before.

The most important result of the Cambodian incursion was perhaps the fact that enemy main force units were driven away from South Vietnam and from its border areas. The departure of these units caused a disruption of coordination between enemy main, local and guerrilla forces and between the enemy infrastructure and these forces. Enemy activities inside South Vietnam, therefore, were no longer as extensive or as effective as they had been. From a strategic viewpoint, this operation caused the enemy to extend and disperse his forces even more, as these forces were forced to spread over Cambodia, in addition to their normal deployments in the DMZ area, in South Vietnam and in Laos. The enemy's requirements for support and coordination therefore multiplied and caused him serious difficulties.

The operation also left enemy troops with a feeling of insecurity. They found that their top echelon headquarters such as COSVN and its military command had been forced to displace and all the areas that thus far had been considered as inviolable were now penetrated, destroyed or damaged and vulnerable to further incursions by our forces. There was a perceptible lowering of the morale of enemy units located in RVN III and IV Corps zones, as accustomed levels of supply and support were unavailable, following attacks on the base areas along the border.

#### *Lessons Learned*

The experiences gained during the Cambodian Incursion provided the RVNAF with several valuable lessons.



### Personnel Loss Reporting and Replacement

During the operation, ARVN ranger and armor units met with serious difficulties in the replacement of losses. As a special incentive, ranger and armor units had, for some time, enjoyed the privilege of directly recruiting replacements. This gave the unit commanders an opportunity to pass on the quality of recruits before they were sent to basic training. This system, which ensured high quality recruits, could not keep up with the growing requirements generated by the sustained combat operations of the incursion. To resolve their difficulties, the Armor and Ranger Commands not only assisted their units in recruitment operations, but also allowed them to recruit more than they were authorized in order to have enough personnel in the pipeline to satisfy replacement needs. Replacement quotas for armor and ranger units were also allotted by J-1, JGS, based on recruiting and training results.

The reporting of unit strength and losses during operations was done every 7 and 15 days, respectively. It was found, however, that this reporting schedule did not permit effective monitoring of unit strength and replacing of unit losses; the tempo of the fighting resulted in increasing losses everyday. To remedy this shortcoming, the JGS instructed units to report their losses every day through operational channels. This measure proved effective in meeting the unusual requirements of the incursion.

### Tactical Operations

Foremost among problem areas concerning tactical operations during the Cambodian Incursion was terrain. Not all ARVN units that participated in this incursion were familiar with the type of dense jungle and mountainous terrain they found in border areas. For those units, which usually operated in the flat, open terrain of the Mekong Delta, such as the 9th, 21st, and 25th Divisions, the terrain of the areas of operation as found in northern Tay Ninh and the Fishhook presented quite serious problems in command and control, fire coordination

and observation. These units did require some time to get acquainted with their new areas of operation and this lowered to some extent their combat effectiveness.

Searching for and discovering enemy supply caches proved to be a difficult and time consuming problem for ARVN units. Prior to the incursion, there was only general information as to the existence of enemy supply storages in the areas of operation. There were no detailed intelligence reports which helped in locating exactly and identifying specifically the various types of caches to be found later. Despite the extensive use of reconnaissance planes, it was impossible to detect these supply caches from the air because they were usually located in the deep jungle and were well concealed. To assist ARVN units in their search, a number of Khmer troops were made available to serve as guides. These Khmer guides were valuable because they were selected from among those who had previously participated in the transportation of NVA supplies from the port of Sihanoukville to various base areas. Several enemy prisoners and several RVNAF personnel previously held prisoner in the base areas and since returned to RVNAF control, were also used to assist in searching and locating supply caches. In general, because of their localized experience and knowledge, they were useful only in those areas where they had operated. This showed that the enemy had taken great care in keeping his system of supply caches secret. During the operation, our forces also captured tons of enemy documents, which provided much new information concerning the enemy system for logistics and infiltration of personnel.

But finally it was the enemy himself who revealed the locations of these supply caches to our troops. This was true especially in the Fishhook area. Before our forces went into Cambodia, many people believed that because of their extensiveness and great numbers, perhaps enemy supply storages were not well organized and protected. But what our forces finally discovered during their search came about as a mild surprise because all of his supply storages were well organized well concealed and well protected. Most of them were underground caches protected against artillery fire and adverse weather. Thus, our troops learned that wherever a contact was made with enemy troops, surely

something important was located nearby, either a storage area or an installation.

Another helpful initiative was the introduction by U.S. II Field Force of two Rome Plow companies. The original mission for the plows was to cut roads into the enemy base areas, permitting the removal of captured enemy materiel by truck and thereby conserving helicopter lift for the RVNAF operations. After introduction, it was realized that the plows were very effective in the search for supplies within the bases areas. In this second mission, the plows could neutralize enemy mines and booby traps, which otherwise caused many friendly casualties. The plows also collapsed enemy bunkers, causing many enemy casualties. The only drawback with the Rome Plow units was that they needed protection and part of our forces had to be diverted for this task. The most effective protection was perhaps that provided by armor units. Had the value of the plows in searching the base areas been anticipated they might have been employed about one week earlier, rather than mid-May, when actually employed.

The incursion showed that the complement of one squadron of VNAF helicopters per corps was insufficient for the level of combat encountered. There were no helicopters dedicated to a single mission; they were used interchangeably as command ships, gunships, for supply, medevac and troop transport. This level of assets, combined with a policy to use VNAF helicopters to the maximum extent, created some problems, even though it was possible to request additional helicopters from the U.S. VNAF helicopter pilots lacked experience in night flight, except those of the 214th Squadron who had flown night missions for the Special Forces. As a result, RVNAF units had to rely on U.S. medevac units for emergency evacuation at night. Drawing lessons from the Cambodian experience, the VNAF stepped up night flying training for its pilots and eventually set aside from two to six medevac helicopters for each military region for use in medical evacuation only.

As to gunship helicopters, they were for the most part overused or misused by ARVN infantry units. This stemmed from the poor habits of ARVN unit commanders who, at each contact with the enemy, invariably called for the support of gunships, even when the targets were solid

fortifications or underground shelters. Some ARVN commanders even called for the support of both gunships and tactical air at the same time, completely oblivious to the time delay involved in each type of support. Meanwhile, it seemed that their organic artillery, which was always available for rapid and accurate fire support, was not always used to the maximum of its capabilities.

When used ARVN artillery performed extremely well during the operation, providing responsive and accurate fire. This was a valuable combat support asset for ARVN infantry units of regimental size; each of them was directly supported by at least one battery, reinforced as required by U.S. artillery units. To ensure effective support, ARVN artillery observers were made available to the company level and one artillery liaison team was assigned to each task force. Unfortunately, these liaison teams were not used properly by ARVN tactical commanders who, as had been said, preferred the employment of gunships and tactical air even when the target was within effective artillery range. During the operation, very few ARVN commanders took time to analyze the nature of each target in order to apply the most appropriate type of fire support. In addition to direct support provided by ARVN artillery units, ARVN task forces received support from U.S. artillery units through U.S. liaison officers assigned to each of them. However, U.S. artillery support was often slow in responding because U.S. artillery units observed strict safety regulations. For example, they had to make sure that no friendly aircraft were in danger anywhere along the trajectory; they checked also to see that the impact area was free of friendly elements.

Because of sustained operation conducted on foreign soil, ARVN field commanders took the commendable initiative of rotating combat units, giving each of them adequate time for rest, recuperation and refitting between operations. Periods of rest varied from one week to ten days. As a result, ARVN Infantry battalions enjoyed a high combat strength and they were always fresh and ready for combat.

## Logistics

This was the first time that the Central Logistics Command (JGS) -- CLC -- had been called on to provide support for a multi-division force operating far from logistic bases in South Vietnam, and the CLC acquitted itself admirably. Aided by fair weather and the availability of roads and waterways in the area of operation, as much as 97% of all supplies were delivered to operational units by well protected roads and waterways.

Much of the terrain on the Cambodian side of the border strongly favored the use of M-113 armored personnel carriers. The only problem was their high rate of fuel and ammunition consumption. When the M-113 APC operated far inland and away from supply routes, this problem became more acute. The use of M-548 recovery vehicles proved effective in resolving it, although the number of M-548's available to the ARVN during the operation was not enough to satisfy all resupply needs. Each ARVN armored cavalry squadron was authorized only four M-548's, which the Cambodian experience showed to be insufficient.

The ARVN committed approximately one-half of its total armor force to the Cambodian incursion: nine armored cavalry squadrons, each consisting of three mixed M-113/M-41 troops.<sup>2</sup> Sustained combat resulted in a high unserviceable rate, probably because ARVN armored vehicles had been overused. Despite efforts by ARVN and U.S. repair teams, the unserviceable rate remained high throughout the operation for one reason: lack of replacement parts. Another problem was the shortage of wreckers which necessitated the use of armored vehicles to pull and tow disabled ones in several cases, especially where the terrain became swampy deep inside Cambodia. Several units even used M-113's to tow 105-mm howitzers. This was a useful expedient, dictated by combat requirements; but, is also lowered the maneuver capabilities of armored squadrons, since M-113's were also required to provide close protection for artillery positions.

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<sup>2</sup>Each ARVN armored cavalry squadron was authorized 72 fighting vehicles.

For those portions of the zone of the incursion which were impracticable for land transportation, the TOAN THANG 41 area for example, the Cambodian experience seemed to indicate that helicopters, especially large capacity CH-47's, would have provided better resupply needs; they also did not require such large security forces as those committed to the protection of land routes.

### *Conclusions*

To the Republic of Vietnam, the Cambodian Incursion was a most welcomed opportunity. In addition to the military victories achieved in Cambodia, the situation throughout South Vietnam improved markedly as a result of the incursion. Subsequently, during 1970 and 1971 the RVNAF were able to hold the initiative on all the battlegrounds in South Vietnam; they gained in self-confidence, and the confidence of the South Vietnamese population in the RVNAF grew. Most encouraging as well was from that time forward, in its struggle against the communists, the RVN had another partner. For Cambodia, which previously had been a potential enemy, became a comrade-in-arms, and ceased to be a source of irritation. As a test of progress of Vietnamization, it showed with great clarity the new maturity of the RVN forces. The RVN for its part, also seized this favorable opportunity to implement its economic development program. In 1970, the RVN was able to launch one of its most ambitious projects, the "Land-to-the-Tiller" program, to radically improve the lot of the farmer. The security situation across the country was so good that tourists who visited South Vietnam during that period were amazed by the calm and peace that reigned everywhere. One could drive his car alone along Route 1, for example, all the way from the Ben Hai River to Ca Mau without risk of sniper fire or land mine, road hazards so common in previous years.

In addition to military gains, the Cambodian Incursion also brought to light some political truths that could be exploited to our advantage. Up to this time, North Vietnam always denied that it maintained troops in South Vietnam or in Cambodia and Laos. To avoid being denounced by world opinion, therefore, NVA forces always tried to keep a low profile

in Cambodia and in Laos. But the incursion had changed all of that. NVA forces were compelled to surface and commit flagrant acts of violence against Cambodia: occupying the northeastern part of the country; surrounding and threatening Phnom Penh; interdicting the Mekong River and the major land lines of communication, Routes 1, 4, 6, and 7, etc. All of these activities revealed the truth about North Vietnam's claims of innocence, as to the presence of NVA troops in Cambodia.

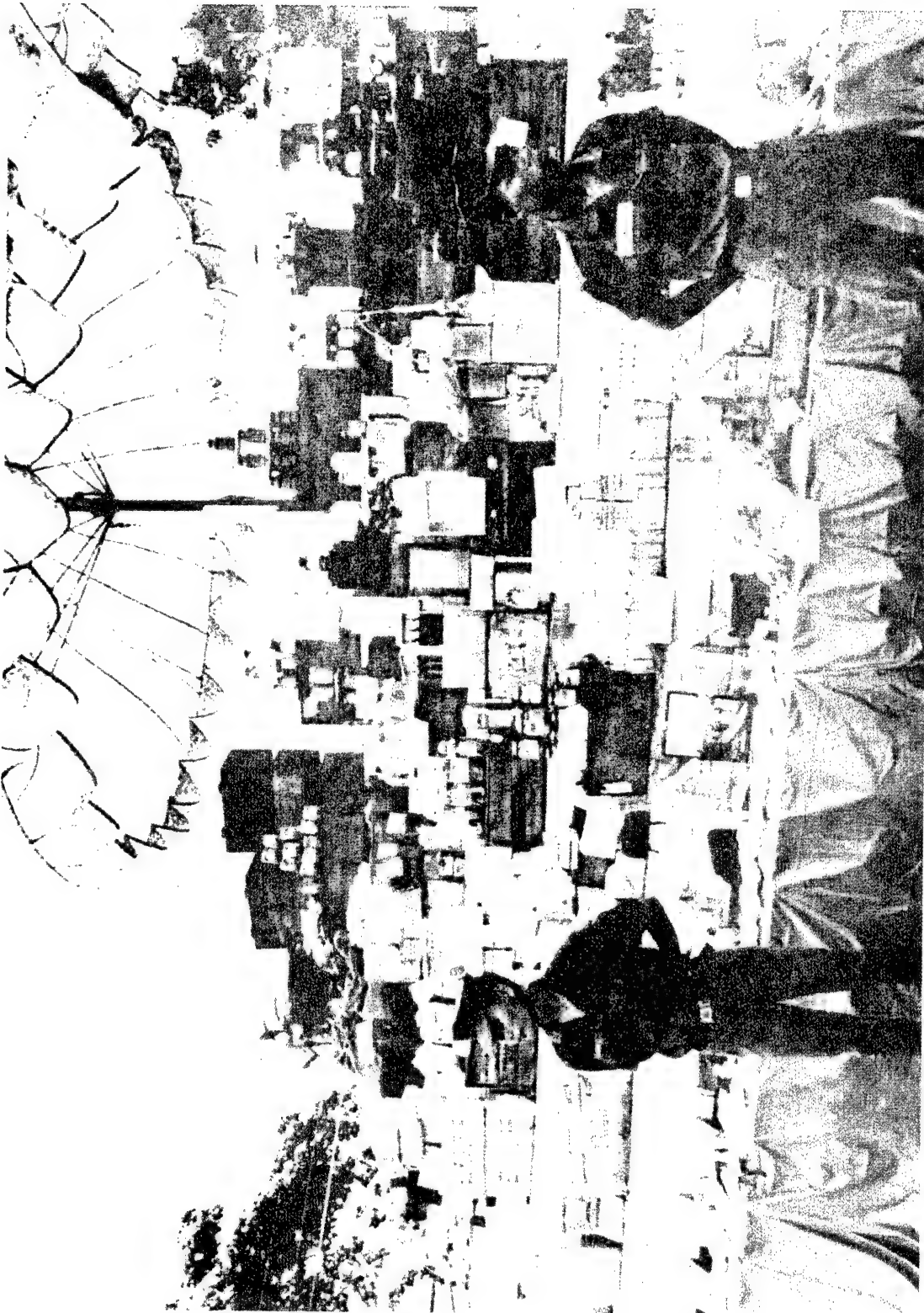
As far as Cambodia was concerned, U.S. and RVN combat activities during the incursion had effectively helped clear the enemy's initial pressure when NVA forces attacked populous areas around Phnom Penh. The incursion also afforded Cambodia more time to expand, equip and retrain its army which, in view of its small size and combat inexperience, had been hardly capable of coping with surprise attacks launched by stronger and better-equipped enemy forces.

Despite its spectacular results, and the great contribution it made to the allied war effort, it must be recognized that the Cambodian Incursion proved, in the long run, to pose little more than a temporary disruption of North Vietnam's march toward domination of all of Laos, Cambodia, and South Vietnam. In spite of very large losses, the enemy had succeeded in taking control of all of Cambodia's northeastern provinces, and because of his pressure, about one-fourth of Cambodia was no longer under the control of Phnom Penh. More importantly, the bulk of NVA forces in Cambodia, which was estimated at about 40,000 men, was still intact and free to roam about in this part of Cambodia. As long as this force remained there, Cambodia was still facing a mortal danger in its struggle for survival. In time -- and time was on his side -- the enemy would readjust his infiltration routes along the Ho Chi Minh Trail to accommodate the necessary larger tonnages. With most of eastern Cambodia under NVA control, the old enemy base areas could be reestablished as well.

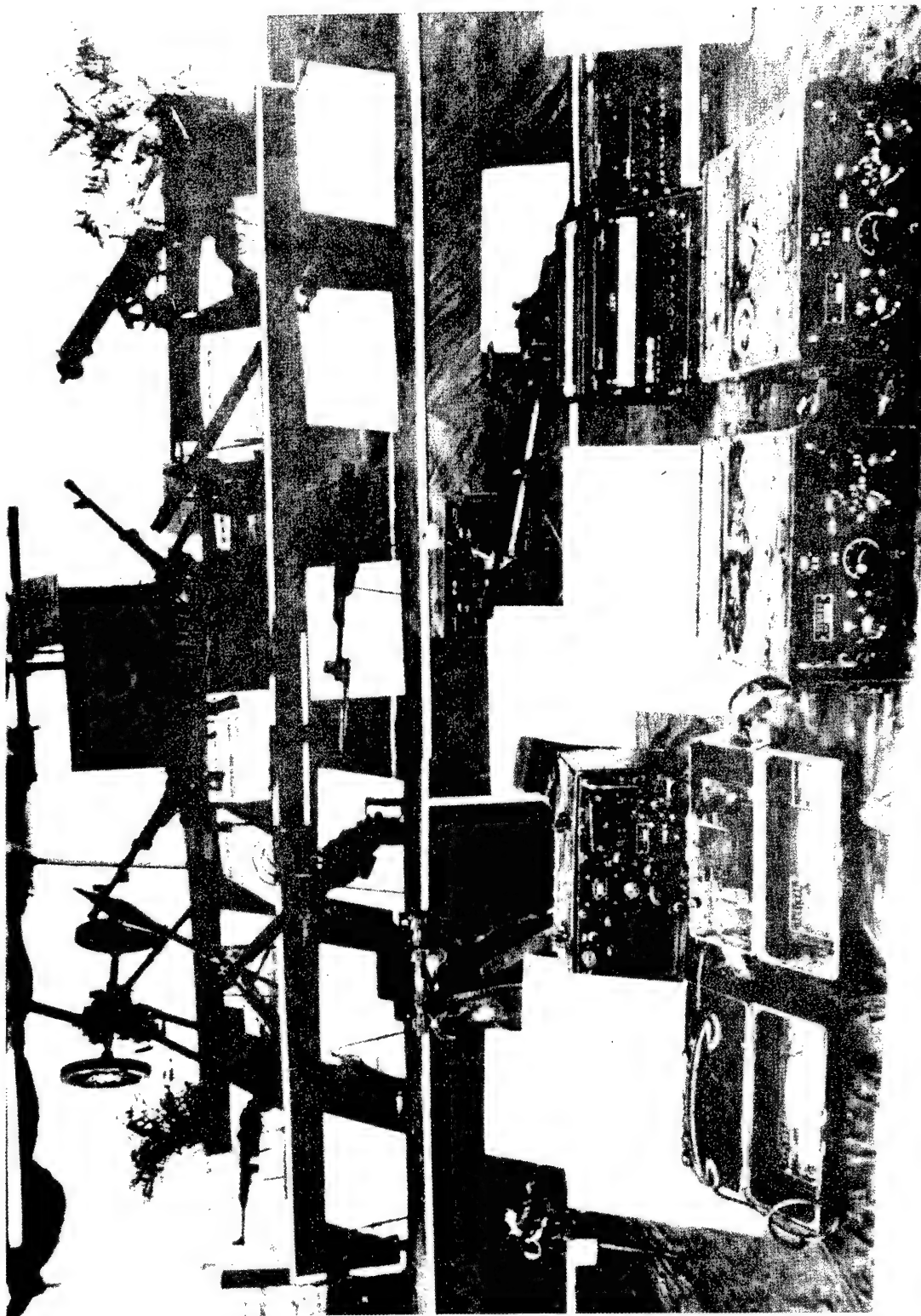
In the face of these enemy long-range options, there was no corresponding U.S./RVN strategy. Having destroyed the enemy base areas along the Cambodian border, the RVNAF had accomplished a long-held objective, following which it concentrated on improving the security

situation inside South Vietnam. There was no plan to return to the border areas to conduct operations of value to Cambodia or to keep the enemy base areas cleared out. In the absence of any such long-range repeat operations it is not difficult to explain the temporary nature of the advantage accruing to the U.S./RVNAF war effort from the Cambodian Incursion. To incapacitate North Vietnam, and end the war on our terms, it would have been necessary to bring that country completely to its knees. But that was a different and much larger problem.

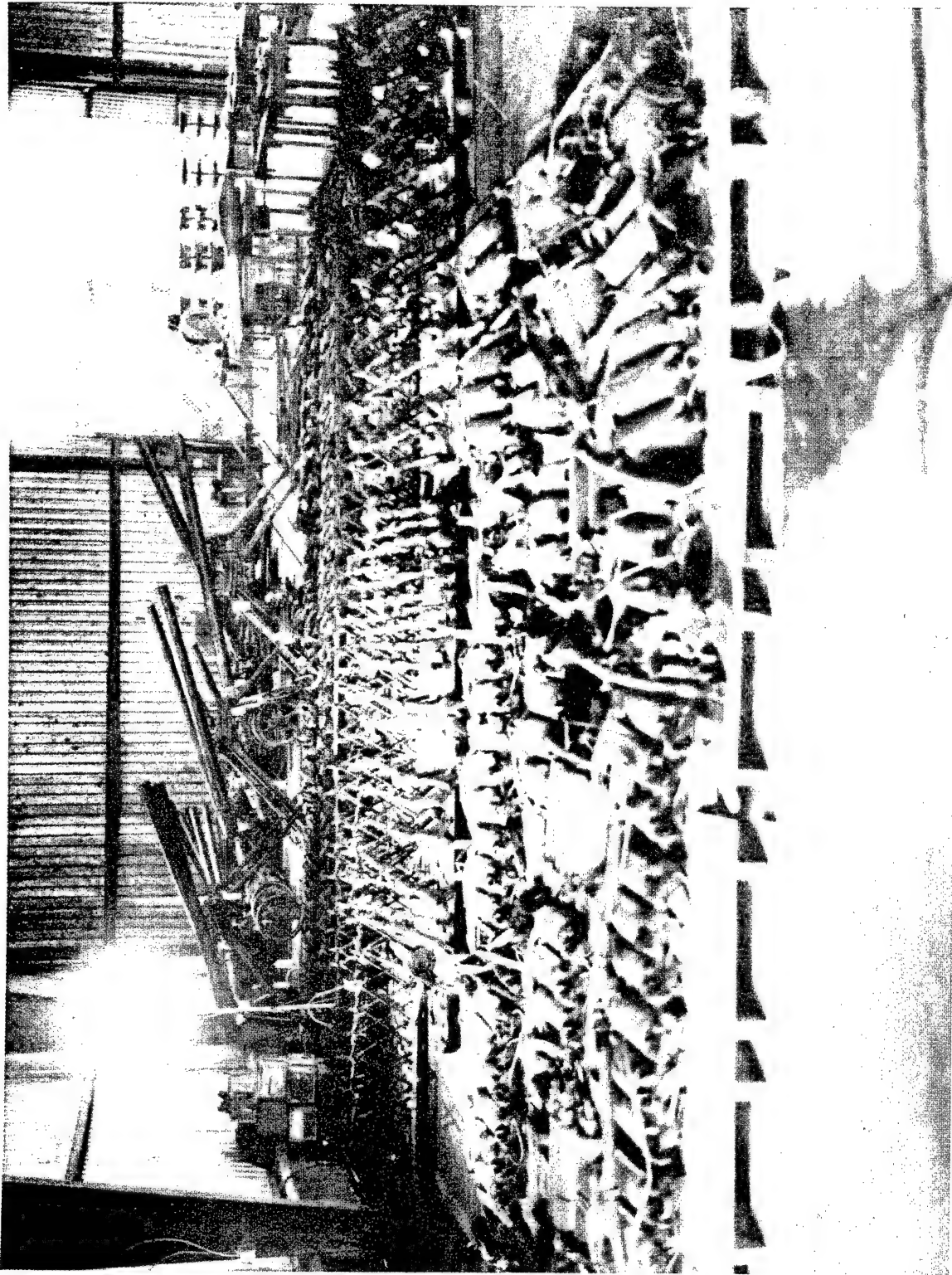




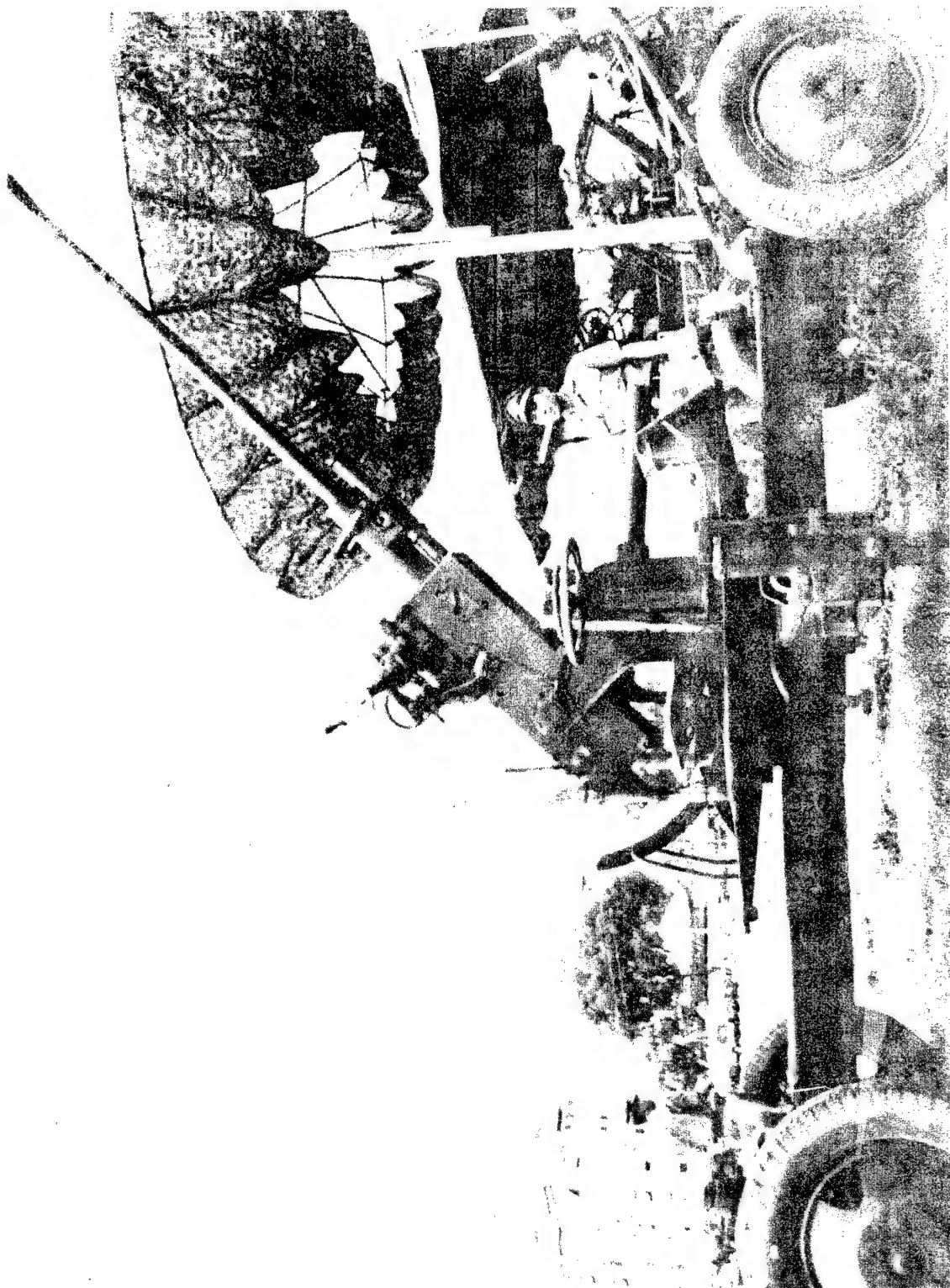
Medical Supplies Captured in Cambodia during the Incursion



Communication Equipment Captured in Cambodia during the Incursion

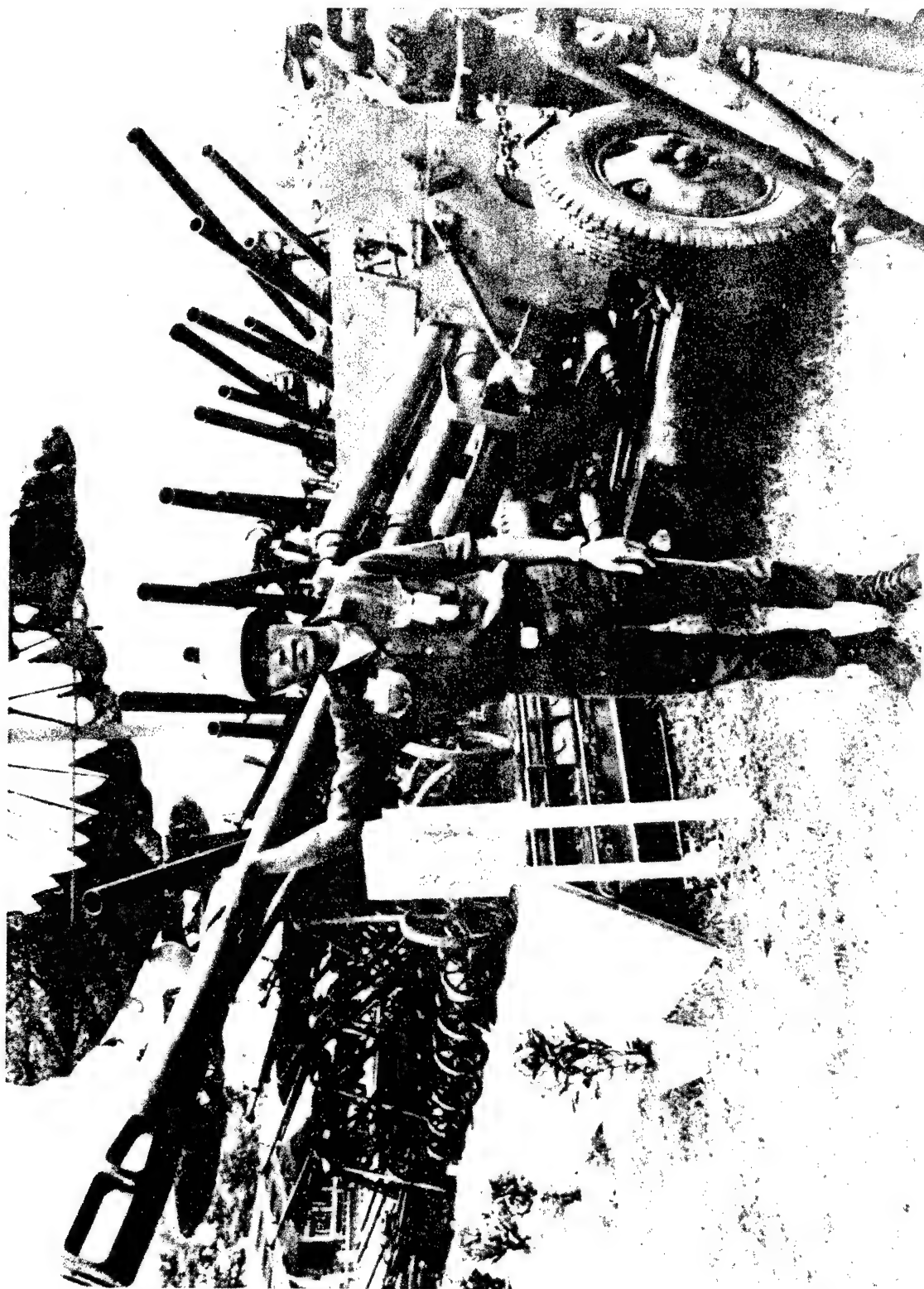


Communist Flame Throwers and Rocket Launchers Captured in Cambodia  
during the Incursion



Antiaircraft Gun Captured in Cambodia during the Incursion





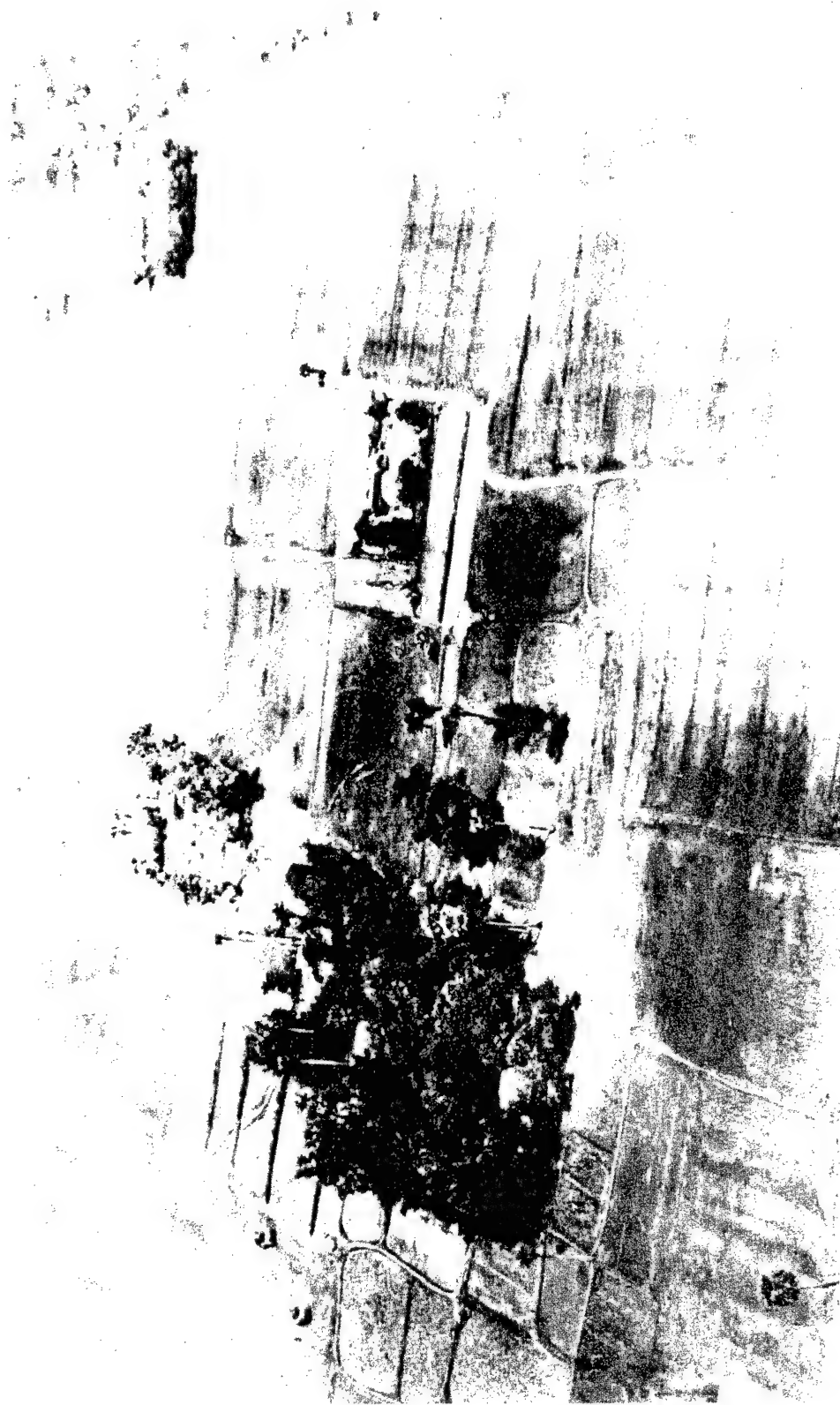
Soviet 57-mm Antitank Gun Captured in Cambodia during the Incursion



Soviet-made Amphibious Tank Captured in Cambodia during the Incursion



General Cao Van Vien, Chairman of the Joint General Staff, is briefed on developments in Cambodia by LTG Do Cao Tri, III Corps Commander; Col. Le Cong Hieu, III Corps, G3; and Col. Tran Quang Khoi, Task Force 381 Commander



ARVN Tanks from Task Force 225 Operate in the Parrot's Beak Region during the Incursion





Lt. General Do Cao Tri, III Corps Commander,  
Questions a Captured Enemy Soldier in Cambodia during the Incursion

Appendix A  
 Enemy Losses, Cambodian Incursion  
 (As of 30 June 1970)

1. Casualties

Killed . . . . .	11,369
Prisoners and Ralliers . . . . .	2,328

2. Material and Supplies

Individual Weapons . . . . .	22,892
Crew-Served Weapons . . . . .	2,509
Installation, shelters destroyed . . . . .	11,688
Small-arms ammunition, mortar . . . . .	16,762,167 rounds
Hand grenades . . . . .	62,022
Explosives . . . . .	83,000 lbs
Antiaircraft ammunition . . . . .	199,552 rounds
Mortar ammunition . . . . .	68,593 rounds
Rockets, 107- and 122-mm . . . . .	2,123
Rockets, B-40 and B-41 . . . . .	43,160
Recoilless rifle ammunition . . . . .	29,185
Vehicles, all types . . . . .	435
Pharmaceutical products . . . . .	110,800 lbs
Rice . . . . .	14,046,000 lbs

# Appendix B

## Friendly Casualties, Cambodian Incursion (Total RVNAF and U.S.)

OPERATION/UNITS	KIA	WIA	MIA
BINH TAY/II Corps and U.S. 4th Inf. Div.	88	165	2
TOAN THANG/III Corps and U.S. II FFV	761	3,700	46
CUU LONG/IV Corps and DMAC	127 <sup>1</sup>	669	0
	976 <sup>2</sup>	4,534 <sup>3</sup>	48 <sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>RVNAF casualties included Major General Nguyen Viet Thanh, Commander IV Corps, who died o/a 10 May 1970 from a helicopter collision over an area located on the Kien Tuong-Kien Phong provincial boundary during the CUU LONG operation.

<sup>2</sup>338 U.S. included in this total KIA.

<sup>3</sup>1,525 U.S. included in this total WIA.

<sup>4</sup>13 U.S. included in this total MIA.

Appendix C

Military Elements of the U.S. Embassy Phnom Penh  
18 March to 30 June 1970

by

Colonel Harry O. Amos, U.S. Army (Retired)

## Appendix C

### Military Elements of the U.S. Embassy Phnom Penh 18 March to 30 June 1970

#### *U.S. Defense Attache Office at the End of the Sihanouk Period*

The reestablishment of a United States diplomatic mission in Cambodia in August 1969 saw the return of a U.S. military presence, in the form of a Defense Attache Office, after an absence of almost four years. Lt. Colonel Charles A. Wolfe, USA had had the unpleasant duty of closing the Army Attache Office in the Embassy in Phnom Penh in the spring of 1965, when Communist pressure on Sihanouk had finally brought a complete end to relations which had been limping since the ouster of the USMAAG in Cambodia in the Fall of 1963.

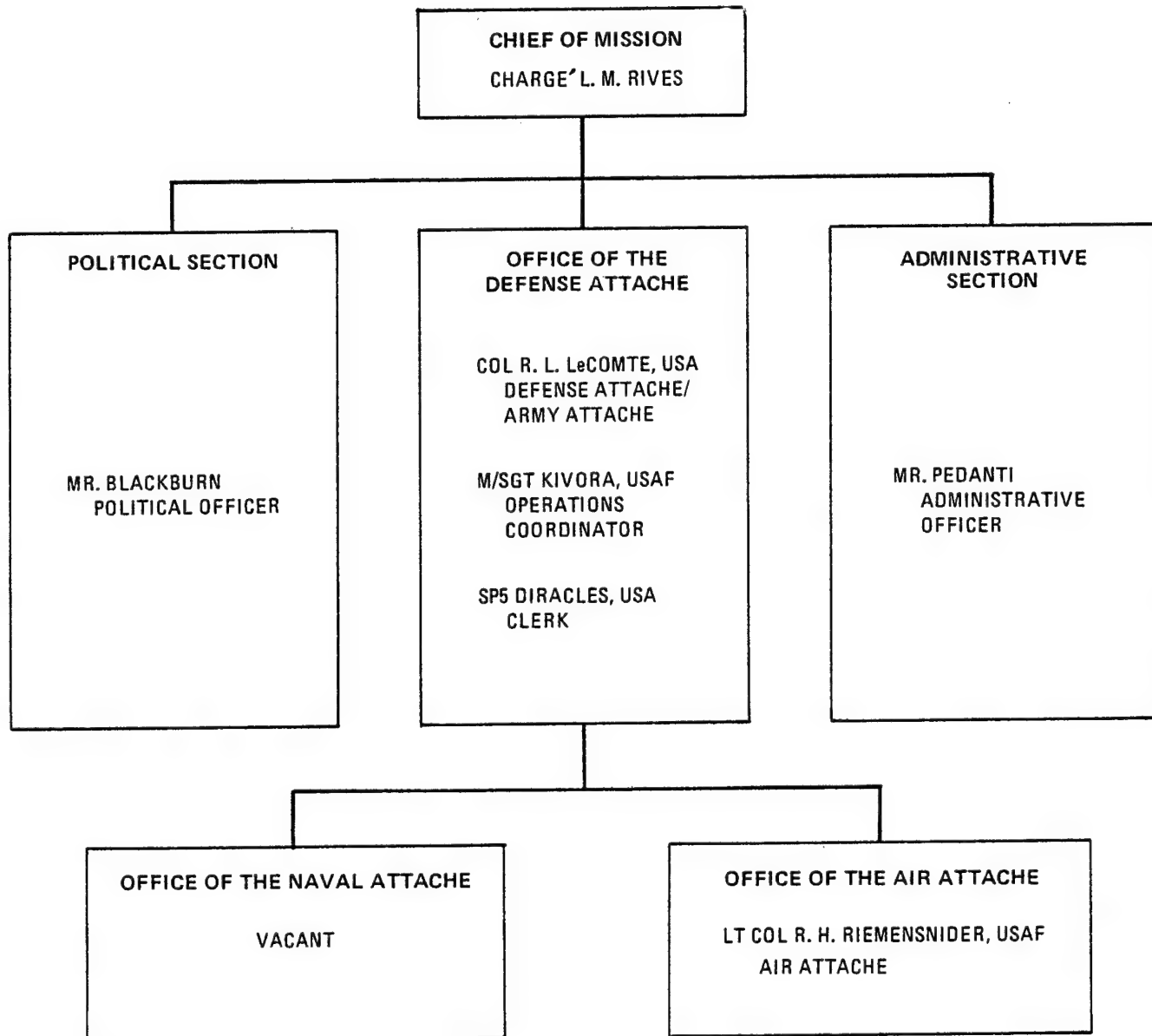
The new mission was a far cry from its 1963 predecessor which had consisted of Ambassador, Embassy, MAAG of some 75 personnel, USOM mission of some 100 personnel, Army Attache Office resident, Naval and Air Attaches accredited and resident in Saigon, CIA station, National Police Advisors, International Voluntary Services (IVS), U.S. Information Service and a USIS Library.

In 1969, there was a Charge and a mission consisting of five officers. (*Chart 1*)

The minuscule size of this mission and its "low profile" approach to representation was in striking contrast to the U.S. military and diplomatic presence in the remainder of Indochina difficult to describe.

Colonel Le Comte and Lt. Colonel Riemensnider arrived in Phnom Penh together on 30 October 1969. They had departed Washington in October, still without entry visas for Cambodia, and had to wait in Bangkok for two weeks before the visas were obtained through the Indonesia Embassy. They were met on arrival by the Charge and Sergeant Kivora. Kivora's visa had been delivered first; so it was this lone Air Force Master

Chart 1 — Organization of the U. S. Embassy, Phnom Penh in October 1969



Sergeant who led the U.S. military delegation back to Phnom Penh.

First contacts were with Lt. Colonel Robin Morison, Australian Military Attache, whose Embassy had handled U.S. affairs during the break, and with Lt. Colonel Clement Bouffard, Canadian Military Representative to the International Control Commission (ICC). Both were most helpful in filling the newly arrived Americans in on events of the recent past.

Contacts with the Khmer and other foreigners retained all of the formality and lack of reality so well remembered from the old Sihanouk days. Le Comte and Riemensnider called on the Dean of the Attaches, Soviet Colonel Balakirev at his home on 3 November. On 13 November, they saw Colonel Keu Pau Ann, Chief of the Air Force and Commander Vong Sarendy, Chief of the Navy. Vong Sarendy and some of the younger officers of the Air Force hinted in these initial contacts that they would like to be more friendly than Sihanouk policy permitted. Despite the fact that Sihanouk wanted to use the new U.S. presence to strengthen his hand with the VC/NVA, the official line in November 1969 was that U.S. military attaches had been accepted in order to facilitate the processing of protests against Vietnamese and U.S. violations of the Cambodian border. They would serve also as witnesses to these acts of "aggression."

#### The Visit to Mondolkiri Province

On 22 November 1969, they were given just such an opportunity to witness. There had been an incident at the village of Dak Dam in Mondolkiri Province (west of Ban Me Thuot). The Cambodians organized a visit to Dak Dam and invited the press (local and foreign), all resident military attaches, and the ICC. (Members at that time were Canada, India, and Poland.) It was the same old scenario; Lt. Colonel Wolfe and his assistant, Major Harry O. Amos, USA, had made a similar trip to the vicinity of Chan Trea in Svay Rieng Province during the dry season of 1962-63.

Riemensnider gives this description of the trip to Dak Dam:

"We were flown from Phnom Penh to Sen Monorom airfield, northwest of Dak Dam, and proceeded to Dak Dam by convoy, one hour and twenty minutes enroute. It seems that the village and the adjacent military outpost, Camp Le Rolland, had been plastered by a series of air raids from about mid-October until 18 November. It was probably VNAF or, possibly, 7th U.S. Air Force aircraft making the attack. They had pretty well blasted the village, including the school, and virtually destroyed Camp Le Rolland; they'd used 500 or 1000 pound bombs, napalm and strafing to boot. Le Comte and I stayed pretty "low key," and it was Commissioner Gorham of the ICC (the Canadian and a strong supporter of the U.S. position) who asked most of the questions, including those concerning the possibility of the Communists using the area in and around the village to emplace artillery for firing across the border. Sak Sutsakhan, speaking for the Sihanouk government, repeatedly stated that it was contrary to Cambodian Government policy to permit foreign troops on her soil. During our lunch break, a government sponsored picnic catered by Air Cambodge, Le Comte and I did find places where artillery pieces had been emplaced in small clearings in the forest. The Cambodian forces in the area possessed no field pieces that could qualify, only some mobile 37-mm antiaircraft guns, most of which had been destroyed or damaged in the air attack. The 7th Air Force put on a "firepower demonstration" for us during lunch by attacking with bombs and rockets a suspected enemy position just across the border. An amusing incident -- there was a Montagnard tribesman with his cross bow and arrows in the area after lunch. They talked him into demonstrating his cross bow for us. He fired in a high arching trajectory and about the time we expected the arrow to impact there was one hell of an explosion in that direction from one of the bombs that had detonated. The crowd roared and applauded and the tribesman had one surprised and startled look on his face. We reversed course to Se Monorom and arrived back in Phnom Penh about 7:00 pm that evening."

On 28 November 1969, the Soviet destroyer "Blestiachtchy" arrived at Sihanoukville (Kompong Som) on an official visit. Some of the crew, who were also acrobats, entertained at the Soviet Embassy in Phnom Penh and the following day the military attaches were invited to visit the ship.



On 11 December 1969, Le Comte and Riemensnider were received by Colonel U-Say, Chief of Logistics, and Colonel Sak Sutsakhan acting Chief of the General Staff. The visit with U-Say lasted more than an hour, during which the Americans were subjected to a propaganda laced exposition of Sihanouk policy. The meeting with Sak Sutsakhan was shorter, more cordial, and not as stereotyped by comparison.

In December 1969, the ICC withdrew from Cambodia. Clearly unable to accomplish its mission, its activities had degenerated into constant bickering between Commissioner Gorham on the one hand and the Indian and Polish representatives on the other. There was also a problem with Sihanouk, who had not been paying Cambodia's agreed share of financial support for this brainchild of the first Indochina peace settlement.

During this period, the attaches, and the entire mission for that matter, were careful to avoid any action which would indicate that they were coordinating their activities with or taking direction from the U.S. mission in Saigon. But the U.S. in Saigon maintained a keen interest in what was happening in Cambodia; for some time there had existed there a special inter-agency Cambodia Committee, with representatives from MACV, 7th Air Force and the Embassy. One State Department member of this committee was Mr. Andrew F. Antippas, who would spend the next six years on Cambodian affairs in Phnom Penh and in the Department.

During the week of 11 January 1970, Riemensnider received a request from 7th Air Force that he visit Saigon. Rives approved but directed travel via Bangkok, from where Riemensnider took the military shuttle on 19 January to Saigon. During a week's stay, Riemensnider met with all military intelligence activities, and attended a meeting of the Cambodia Committee.

#### The Visit to Koh Kong Province

On 5 February 1970, Colonel Kim Eng Khuroudeth, the J-2 of the General Staff, called a meeting of the military attaches to announce plans for a trip to Koh Kong Province the following week. Even with Sihanouk departed from Cambodia since 6 January 1970, nothing appeared to have changed. The purpose of this trip was to expose Thai aggression

in the form of fishermen taking fish illegally from Cambodian waters. Riemensnider describes the trip:

"We departed the morning of 9 January by attache vehicles and were accompanied by armed Cambodian military escort. We went overland on a dusty road most of the way but were then put aboard a ferry boat for the remainder of the trip to Khemarak Phouminville; our chauffeurs completed the road trip and met us on our arrival. On the 10th we visited several fishing villages and were briefed on the problem of Thai fishermen using Cambodian waters and fishing grounds. They claimed to have something like 70 or 90 of them in a local jail. On the 11th we were taken in a big, old scow of a boat up the river from Khemarack Phouminville to a waterfall where we enjoyed a picnic and a swim. As usual, our armed guards accompanied us. Of interest was that one of the guards, who took his position in a hollowed out rock formation near the waterfall, had as his personal weapon a U.S. automatic rifle (M-14 or 16). He, when queried, indicated that he had purchased it on the black market. On 12 February we were taken on a boat trip and boarded a fishing boat for their run with the nets. Incidentally, the boats that they used to move us around the area were really captured Thai fishing boats, marked MRK, Marine Royale Khmère. In the shallow water near the ports and docks were numerous sunken Thai fishing boats. On 13 February we visited the airport under construction at Khemarack Phouminville; also the Province Office, where we were exposed to loads of data on the expansion of fishing and industry in the area and improvements in education, etc. We returned by car to Phnom Penh on Saturday 14 February."

Afterwards, there was speculation in the U.S. Embassy that the Cambodians may have wanted the military attaches in Koh Kong, and out of Phnom Penh, while they planned for the events of the following month. On 20 February 1970, the Embassy-DAO diplomatic pouch service, which arrived via commercial air from Bangkok, was cut off for several days by the Khmer without reasonable explanation.

This moment of apparent political calm in February 1970, with an undercurrent of events flowing swiftly toward the deposition of Norodom Sihanouk, and the break-up of the Royal Kingdom of Cambodia, is an

appropriate point to turn from the Khmer story in order to describe the U.S. policy for official presence in Cambodia. It was a policy referred to as "low profile" at the Embassy. The State Department could hardly have selected a Chief of Mission better prepared to head a small mission (whose purpose was essentially to see and not to be seen) than Lloyd M. Rives; nor could there have been a selection better calculated to astound and exasperate the hard chargers in the Department of Defense, and in Saigon. A thoroughly competent and dedicated career Foreign Service Officer, he had operated a one-man office in Laos in his early service, and more recently had observed the mentality of small nations in Africa. He prided himself -- and with good reason -- on having the professional discipline to execute his orders as given. In this case they were from the State Department and they were to remain inconspicuous, regardless of what other agencies may have thought or wanted. During his visits to the Department of Defense prior to departing for Phnom Penh he told officers in the Joint Staff that he considered himself quite talented at sitting on his hands.

Rives installed the Embassy offices in the servant quarters of the Residence, itself a three story reinforced concrete pile of the style so dear to the hearts of the ex-patriate French architects of Phnom Penh. Facing from the Residence, communications and administrative personnel were on the ground floor. Upstairs, on the left end, was the secretary, Pat Hughes, with desk and a one-line telephone. In the adjacent room, a large one, were Blackburn and Rives. Rives had the only other telephone instrument, kept on a wooden box next to his desk, and tied to the one single incoming line which all shared; he frequently answered the telephone himself. People downstairs walked up to the secretary's office to use the phone. In the room to the right of Rives were the two military attaches, seated in straight back chairs at locally purchased desks. The attache administrative office had a desk of sorts; the chairs were wooden boxes, as was the file cabinet, and there was a field safe on the floor. Attache personnel passed through Rives' office to get to the phone, or down the steps on the right end of the building, across the front, and up the stairs to the secretary's office. There were no security guards, and people wandered in and out, almost at will.

But if the offices bore a touch of the comic, communications with the outside world was pure grand opera. The Embassy communications section, which possessed no mechanical encoding or decoding equipment, was tied to the Cambodian commercial service in Phnom Penh, from where all traffic was routed to Manila. In Manila, messages were put into the U.S. network for transmission to other parts of the world. Commercial service to the Embassy was cut off daily from 2:00 am until 6 or 7:00 am. There was no connection of any kind with either Saigon or Bangkok, except through Manila.

On 4 March 1970, Colonel Le Comte departed Phnom Penh for reassignment.

#### Prelude to 18 March 1970

The events leading to the change of government were first observable to the DAO on 8 March when demonstrations broke out in Svay Rieng and other locations outside the capital, demonstrations which were in protest against the presence of North Vietnamese troops on Cambodian territory; they continued through 10 March. On 11 March, so-called student and youth demonstrations in Phnom Penh sacked the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Embassies and the commercial office of North Vietnam. Rives let Blackburn move around the fringes of the crowds, where he recognized several Cambodian military personnel in civilian clothes. Files were removed from the buildings and burned in the street; also several automobiles were burned. There were only minor injuries in the relatively few scuffles that ensued. The whole operation had the appearance of being well planned, moving from one of the three targets on to the next, with leaders knowing exactly what they were doing. Rives and Riemensnider watched through field glasses from the Residence roof the three columns of smoke that resulted. There were a few hours of anxiety trying to keep track of the crowds, and wondering if they might move on the Americans.

On 12 March, Prime Minister Lon Nol, in the name of the government, issued an ultimatum, demanding that North Vietnamese and Viet Cong troops leave Cambodia within 72 hours. At the same time, First Deputy Prime

Minister Sirik Matak cancelled the trade treaty between Cambodia and the Provisional Revolutionary Government.

On 13 March, the Cambodians cancelled a visit to Phnom Penh by U.S. astronauts, which had been scheduled for the 17th and 18th of March.

The action of the Khmer on 18 March 1970 to end the political career of Sihanouk took the entire diplomatic community in Phnom Penh by surprise. Communications were cut off with the outside world, and the airport was closed. Rives had to use the British facilities to pass a message to Washington via London reporting what had happened.

There was very little information available in Phnom Penh to explain exactly what was going on. The United States, Australians, British, and to a certain degree, the French, shared what they had. French military personnel in Phnom Penh, particularly the Military Attache, Lt. Colonel Sonolet, and the Chief of the French Military Mission, Brigadier General Vieil, made clear from the 18th of March on their own sympathy for the anti-Communist elements now in charge of the Cambodian government. Sonolet had spent some twelve years of his military career in Cambodia, and had a good grasp of the military situation. Although the official French position was hands-off, the French Ambassador and Vieil were exceedingly cooperative with the U.S. Embassy in an effort to justify some form of U.S. support.

#### "Columbia Eagle"

Caught without a coordinated policy, and not wanting to give the slightest hint of complicity in the departure of Sihanouk, nothing could have been more unwelcome for the U.S. than actions by several U.S. merchant seamen in the Gulf of Thailand at this moment. The "Columbia Eagle" was a U.S. merchant ship carrying a cargo of air munitions for USAF units in Thailand. Shortly after 18 March 1970, the crew mutinied off the coast of Cambodia and forced the ship into the port of Sihanoukville (Kompong Som). The captain was brought to Phnom Penh and put in detention and isolation. The Khmer were not exactly sure what they should do about all of this. There were all sorts of rumors in the capital: the mutiny had been engineered by the Communists; or, it had all been arranged by the

U.S. CIA and pro-Lon Nol Cambodians to bring arms in to support the overthrow of Sihanouk. As far as Riemensnider could determine, there was nothing on board the ship that could have been carried by or adapted to any of the aircraft in the Khmer Air Force.

### Start of Hostilities

The Communist offensive against the Cambodian forces began, according to observations of the Embassy, within a week after the removal of Sihanouk. There was a series of small attacks against isolated villages and small military outposts, remote from Phnom Penh, in Ratanakiri, and in the regions along the border southeast of the capital.

### *U.S. Defense Attache Office After 18 March 1970*

With the departure of Colonel Le Comte, the DAO entered a period of intense activity with one officer, Reimensnider, and two enlisted men. The ouster of Sihanouk brought an abrupt and profound change in the relationship of the DAO with the Cambodians. Not only was there increased intelligence activity, but the DAO soon became involved in the additional functions of military operational reporting and military assistance for the FANK.

Although the 72 hour period of compliance with the ultimatum had passed, and although there was little hope that the Communists would bow to so inferior an adversary, the Cambodians did not wish to foreclose the slightest possibility that the Communists might do what was asked. Thus the approaches to the U.S. attaches, which accelerated rapidly from the 18th of March, were carried out with deliberate and, at times, ingenious discretion. Khouroudeth began to forward through the Australian and British military attaches in Phnom Penh intelligence information on the locations of enemy troop units. He also requested specific intelligence information from Saigon through these same channels.

Another channel developed in a surprising manner. One day, about 25 March, the Embassy translator, a young Cambodian man, came to Riemensnider in the company of a Cambodian in the uniform of a corporal. After introductions, it turned out that both the translator and the corporal were not only friends, but members of SEDOC (Section de Documentation et de Recherche) a covert intelligence activity of the Cambodian armed forces. SEDOC wanted to provide the U.S. with the locations of enemy units and supply dumps. At a second meeting with the SEDOC representative, Riemensnider was told that the military sub-region commander in TAKHMAU, south of the capital on the Bassac River, wanted to see him; however, the commander could not be seen talking to the U.S. military attache in his office. Riemensnider was to drive his car to Kilometer Mark No. 9 on Highway No. 1 south of Phnom Penh, park on the grass between the river and highway, walk directly to the river, go down the steps and enter the houseboat he would find there. The appointment was kept --Rives was told later -- and it provided useful information on enemy unit and supply locations.

Before the end of March it was, according to Riemensnider, clear to the Cambodians that the Communists would not leave the country; and, that they would have to fight. At that point indirect approaches were discontinued; Khouroudeth opened up and gave the U.S. directly all the information he had. Riemensnider had a second meeting with his friend in Takhmau, this time in his command post. Interestingly enough, the long conversation touched only briefly on the enemy; rather, he and the members of his staff wanted to discuss the idea of a republic, what it meant to be a republic, what a Khmer Republic might be like.

#### Cambodian Armed Forces (FANK) War Room

Immediately after the start of hostilities, FANK organized a War Room at the Headquarters, where they tried to keep track of the friendly and enemy situation. Inadequacy of communications at all levels in the FANK was a constant problem. DAO had complete access to the War Room, but was rarely confident of the currency or validity of the information coming in from the field. Some was passed by word of mouth from

villages and tended to exaggerate enemy forces; that from military sources was frequently incomplete and spotty as to detail, and not current because of communication limitations. Often it was obviously exaggerated as to enemy strengths, due in some degree to the desire of the FANK field commander to justify additional supplies and support from the very limited resources available to FANK Headquarters. Because of these conditions, DAO and the Embassy made use of every possible source of information on the military situation.

#### Target Information and Requests for Air Strikes

FANK supplied target information; and, requests for air strikes on Communist positions shortly began to pour into DAO and the Embassy. Starting with a request from Riemensnider's contact at Takhmau, the list of requestors soon expanded to include Khouroudeth, Air Force Headquarters, Navy Headquarters, a courier from SEDOC Headquarters in Phnom Penh, and even a few directly from Lon Nol, through Rives. Some were so vague they could not be located on the maps available to DAO. These requests were all passed to Embassy Saigon and MACV, without any effort to evaluate them. They were passed for information only, and the Khmer were always informed that Embassy Phnom Penh passed such requests to Saigon for information only. Some of the locations were struck, but DAO never knew whether the RVNAF or U.S. decision to strike was based on Phnom Penh supplied information or some other intelligence.

#### U.S. Requests for Information on the Cambodian Military Situation

As soon as it became clear that the FANK was going to take action against the VC/NVA, DAO began to receive all sorts of requests for information. Riemensnider received a series of personal messages from Lt. General Voght, USAF, J-3 of the JCS. They contained queries as to specific and general capabilities of the FANK. All carried the priority URGENT and arrived at the Embassy about midnight. The Embassy communications clerk would decode the message and then go to Riemensnider's house to tell him to come to the Embassy to read it; there were no



telephones in the quarters of the Embassy staff. This precipitated a rush to get to the Embassy, draft a reply, and get it transmitted to Manila before the Cambodia communications facility came to its normal halt in operations at about 2:00 am.

#### The Visit to Chipu on 6 April 1970

On 4 April 1970, the Communists openly attacked the military outpost in the village of Chipu in Svay Rieng Province (near the Vietnamese border). On 6 April 1970, the Khmer organized the escort for a convoy of private vehicles to take the press and military attaches to see the destruction to the post and the village. Riemensnider describes the trip:

"It was an all-day excursion across the ferry at Neak Luong and on down Route No. 1, almost to the Vietnamese border. Colonel Phan Muong was military Sub-Region commander with headquarters at Svay Rieng, at the time. In Chipu we were briefed on the several attacks by fire and the final attack on the outpost on 4 April. An effort was made to gain some sympathy for the Khmer position in opposition to the Viet Cong. Shortly before noon that day, a Japanese member of the press, his driver and another press representative looked for something a little more interesting and exciting by heading unescorted down Route No. 1, in the direction of South Vietnam. They found their excitement only 5 or 6 kilometers outside of Chipu. The Khmer pushed on down the road in armored cars and jeeps and found the overturned and burned Mercedes of the press at the side of the road. We had lunch in Chipu and in mid-afternoon started the trek back toward Phnom Penh. At the side of the road, as we left the village, were two young men on motorcycles; they were later identified as Sean Flynn, son of the late movie actor, and another American news photographer. As we headed west from Chipu, they headed east, down Route 1 and haven't been heard of since."

#### Communications problems with CINCPAC

In late April, Riemensnider received a surprise visitor, who

arrived from Bangkok, and he carried three messages from CINCPAC, Admiral McCain. They were all addressed to DATT Phnom Penh, and had arrived in Bangkok over a period of about a week. The first message requested information concerning the Cambodian armed forces, equipment, etc. The second message referenced the first message and extended the questions and details previously requested. The third also raised some additional questions, but according to Riemensnider, it took no stroke of genius to realize that message number three also wanted to know just why messages numbers one and two had not been answered.

Although the evidence uncovered thus far does not connect this incident directly with the dispatch to Phnom Penh in June 1970 of a mobile military communication facility, it was certainly part of the frustration felt by all military headquarters at not being able to communicate in a twentieth-century manner with the U.S. military representatives in Phnom Penh. Rives did not want the military equipment, stating that the Embassy had a communication facility, and one was enough. His ire at being thus outvoted was not calmed in any way by its place of installation. Housed in two enormous, white-painted vans, they had to be near the Embassy offices and could not be parked on the street. With the offices behind the residence, and no other space available, the vans were put into the court yard. Here they formed a sort of obstacle course, separating Rives from quarters and office, and provoking a continuous stream of expletive from the Chief of Mission.

#### Embassy Operations after 18 March 1970

At a time when there were only three officers in the entire mission, it was impossible to separate their work into neat divisions of intelligence, political reporting, military assistance, message writing, etc. It is impossible now to realize the crush of work that fell on these three. There was not only the change in government; there was a war and no real way to find out what was going on; there were completely new questions of military assistance; there was the press, who had just discovered Phnom Penh and demanded time and attention from

the mission out of all proportion to the mission's ability to give; and finally there were the U.S. military headquarters, staffed for combat, with the insatiable appetite for information deriving therefrom.

All of this was still further complicated by the U.S. policy process which could not let all of the players know the signals. As far as the JCS were concerned there was a war on in Cambodia, and there was a valid U.S. need to know what was going on there. Having heard nothing to the contrary, Rives presumed that the policy was still "low profile."

So these three Embassy officers functioned as a team; they divided up the work as seemed most logical, and did the best they could, seven days a week, to meet impossible demands on their time and talents. Rives' own calm and relaxed manner throughout the month of April was responsible in large measure for maintaining sanity and some sense of perspective. Reporting was in two categories: (1) routine matters, which were collected together once a day and dispatched as a single message and (2) questions relating to Khmer requests for military assistance, which had for the moment to be handled by messages in the "EYES ONLY" category. Coordination among the three was facilitated by Rives' practice of having Riemensnider and Blackburn listen while he dictated his messages to Washington. At the same time all three traded information; it was not unusual for Blackburn to have the information Riemensnider needed to reply to a military query, nor for Riemensnider to have the answer to a political question. Blackburn edited the daily situation report, grandly "slugged" as a Joint State Defense message until the Department reminded them that they were not operating at the Washington level.

The following extracts from the daily situation reports give some idea of their content. Note in particular the variety of sources of information on the military situation.

18 April 1970

FM AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

TO: SEC STATE  
CINCPAC FOR POLAD  
DIA FOR DIACO 3  
JOINT STATE - DEFENSE MESSAGE  
  
SUBJECT: Cambodian SITREP

".. One month after Sihanouk's dismissal as Chief of State, Phnom Penh presents two faces. On the one hand tourist groups continue to arrive and daytime activities of ordinary persons appear usual. On the other hand, sandbag emplacements now guard the Ministries of National Defense, Information, Treasury, the principal banks, and communication centers. Civil servants wear khaki; various streets are closed to permit military drill, and lines of trucks and buses depart with recruits and military personnel for unknown destinations ..."

".. Acting DATT informed by officer from Kandal Military Sub-region that agent sources have reported presence of some Chinese military personnel with VC/NVA in base areas along VN border in Kandal Province ... many VC/NVA encountered in the interior are wearing Sihanouk Army and Cambodian Youth (JSRK) (Jeunesse Socialiste Royale Khmère) insignia to create impression that invasion is internal uprising against government.." "... Embassy had received today three notes. One concerns 13 incidents involving the VC/NVN while other two protest total of 13 border violations by US/SVN troops .."

20 April 1970

"At present, Cambodian troops are battling some 2-3000 VC in Kandal Province near SAANG, 30 km south of Phnom Penh. Newsmen report that VC are using rockets and mortars, and appear well entrenched..."

"Ministry of Information published new tally sheet of VC/NVN activity as follows ...

In Takeo Province, Takeo town was attacked during night 15-16 April as well as PSA TON LEAP ... evening 17-18 April VC/NVN tried to cross bridge east of BAT TOM, six km SW of Takeo town ...

For first time, AKP (Agence Khmer Presse) (government press service) reports a number of incidents in Mondolkiri Province."

21 April 1970

"U.S. reporters visiting DAO morning 21 April 70, described following action in vicinity of Takeo town on 20 April. Two-plus Cambodian Battalions moved eastward from Takeo about 1100, 20 April on Route 204 to retake town of Kbal Pou (VT 8511). Bridge at VT 7911 had previously been partially destroyed by VC but remained trafficable as footbridge. Cambodian troops entered Kbal Pou without heavy resistance to find town mostly deserted. VC withdrew some distance but launched heavy mortar attack, causing casualties among Cambodian troops in village ..."

".. Heavy fighting was reported in area Prek Saang, Vicinity Phum Prek ... 20 April. Parts of 6 Cambodian Battalions were involved to both East and West of Bassac River. Cambodians now reportedly established on East-West defensive line one km south of Phum Prek Koy, and fighting continued during day 21 April."

Another question was what to do about all of the requests that began to flood in from MACV, 7th Air Force, CINCPAC, and Embassy Saigon for authorization to send staff representatives to Phnom Penh to visit for two or three days. Riemensnider recommended against any visits in view of the small number of people, the lack of equipment, communications, and the probable need of the visitors for interpreter and escort support from him. For these practical reasons, and in view of what he still considered to be the policy for U.S. representation in Phnom Penh, Rives turned the requests down. It made sense to them in Phnom Penh; it was difficult to understand in Saigon and Hawaii.

#### The DAO and Military Assistance for the Cambodian Armed Forces

Riemensnider, as the only military officer in Embassy, was involved from the start in the question of U.S. military assistance for the FANK. The first approach took place about 25 March, during the so-called transition period. A message from Air Force Headquarters invited Riemensnider to meet the new Chief of the Air Force, Colonel So Satto. When he arrived, he was surprised to see Captain Vong Sarendy, Chief of the Navy, appear from the back room. Sarendy announced that they were speaking for Lon Nol, and wanted to explore the possibility of U.S. military

assistance for the Cambodian forces. They did not want the presence of U.S. troops; what they wanted was material assistance. The conversation lasted about one and one-half hours and dealt in generalities. There was no one from the Army or from the General Staff present at the meeting. At the Embassy, Rives and Riemensnider tried to reconcile what Sarendy and Satto were saying with the pronouncements coming out of the Foreign Ministry, and to determine if the military officers were in fact authorized to speak for the government. In a few days it became clear to Rives and Riemensnider that, for all practical purposes, Lon Nol was in control of the government, and that the initial approaches from Sarendy and Satto were in fact authentic.

From that time until the end of April, questions of military assistance became almost the entire occupation of Riemensnider. There were meetings seven days a week, at times two or three meetings the same day, and at the request of the General Staff. Contacts were with Sak Sutsakhan and U Say for the most part, and concerned the status of requests for military assistance, when delivery might be expected, revisions to lists of items needed, etc. Requests in the FANK General Staff originated almost entirely with U Say until he collapsed in a staff meeting from strain and fatigue. After that, the DAO often dealt with Colonel Mao Sum Khem.

By far the most immediate needs expressed by the General Staff in those early days were for small arms, ammunition, field communications equipment, and personal gear-helmets, field uniforms, ponchos, etc. Later such items as artillery pieces with ammunition, tanks, armored vehicles, ammunition clips for the AK-47 and other Communist weapons, aircraft, helicopters, naval craft and ammunition, maps and just about anything needed to support troops in the field were requested. The DAO attempted to edit and evaluate these requests, but were conscious of their own lack of staff to answer all of the questions or make the judgments implicit in these requests.

The first shipments of assistance for the FANK arrived from Saigon in Vietnamese C-47 aircraft, scheduled for night arrival in Phnom Penh.

*The Augmentation of the Defense Attache Office*

The time-consuming contacts with the General Staff, and the rapidly increasing demands from Washington for information about the status and needs of the Cambodian forces created an immediate requirement for additional help in Phnom Penh. By this time Washington -- the National Security Council Staff -- was addressing Lon Nol's first formal request for military assistance. The nature of future military organization and staffing within the Embassy was being considered as well. Regardless of how this might be settled in the long run, an augmentation of the DAO was the quickest way to get some additional military help into the Embassy. There was also the problem created by the absence of an Army Attache at a time when most military assistance questions related to ground forces.

On 26 April 1970, Colonel Fred Barringer, USA, the Army Attache in Bangkok was advised to be prepared to go to Phnom Penh on twenty-four hours notice, pursuant to decisions in Washington to augment the DAO in Phnom Penh. Barringer would serve temporarily until the arrival of the new DATT, expected on station in June. The following day the order to move to Phnom Penh was given. Barringer arrived in Cambodia on 27 May, accompanied by Lt. Colonel John L. Hicks, USAF, one of the Assistant Air Attaches in Bangkok.

This was very welcome help for Riemensnider, after going it alone for six weeks. But the arrivals from Bangkok did not achieve a force of three where there had been only one; it was more like now there were two, since neither officer from Bangkok spoke any French at all. Hicks could maintain contact with the Air Force, through several officers there who spoke passable English, learned during training in the U.S. before 1964. But at the General Staff, where the Army was represented, there was no one who spoke English. This left Riemensnider with much of his original work.

In early May, Barringer was informed of the details of the projected augmentation to the DAO Phnom Penh. Four TDY officers would be

sent immediately from MACV; the Air Attache would receive two assistants, a C-47 aircraft and the necessary enlisted crew; the Naval Attache, who had been delayed for French language training was now due in May. In addition, DIA would send one officer, a Lt. Colonel, to help with reporting.

Colonel Barringer received no warning that the Incursion would commence. Nor did Rives for all practical purposes. Later he related the sad, ludicrous story of how a combination of White House policy and the antiquated Embassy communications arrangements worked to make the President's personal representative in Cambodia practically the last to know that U.S. troops had crossed the border into the country of his accreditation. The message arrived in code. Since there was no mechanical decoding equipment in the Embassy, Rives was left with the personal chore of the "one-time" pad, a system of encoding and decoding whose level of sophistication -- if not security -- ranks only slightly above Thomas Jefferson's notched stick. As the tedious hand work divulged, word by word, the most momentous news of the decade, and charged Rives with the awesome duty of informing the Cambodian Government, he heard the whole story on the commercial radio. His rush to get to Lon Nol first was not even close; when he arrived, Lon Nol had already finished a press conference.

As soon as the official announcement of the combined Incursion was made, Riemensnider was called to U Say's office. After a short discussion of military requirements, U Say spoke of President Nixon's decision to conduct military operations into the border areas of Cambodia. He described Nixon's decision as a true act of courage and interest in the people of Cambodia. His words and obvious deep emotion could not have been in greater contrast with the Sihanouk propaganda of their first meeting.

The desire of the White House to keep all mention of activities in Cambodia, particularly those related to possible military assistance to Cambodian forces, out of the press led to restrictions on access to Cambodia reporting that made work very difficult at the action officer



level. In response to a query to MACV, General Abrams informed Barringer that only a very small group of people had access to the information on what U.S. troops would be doing in Cambodia on a day-to-day basis; and DATT Phnom Penh was not one of them. The caption: NODIS KHMER restricted information on supply activities for Cambodian forces to a small list of people, by name, in Washington. The author recalls the spectacle of the J-5 Cambodia action officer being directed to draft the Joint Staff reply to some supply question, and being denied access to the incoming message -- in the NODIS KHMER channel -- to which he was preparing the reply. Of course, the efforts to keep U.S. intentions out of the press were unsuccessful, and, for ease of work, these restrictions were relaxed during June 1970.

Later, messages began to arrive at the Embassy announcing specific phases of friendly troop activity for the following day. For security reasons, these messages arrived at the last possible moment, usually in the middle of the night. Rives would take them, jump in the limousine without chauffeur, and deliver them to Lon Nol. After several of these night visits, Rives was told that he could just deliver the messages to Pok Sam An, the FANK Chief of Operations.

With the additional personnel, it was possible to give more attention to the reporting of enemy information and the tactical situation of the Cambodian forces. The TDY officer from DIA organized the production of a daily report known as the DAILY ASSESSMENT OF THE MILITARY SITUATION REPORT (DAMSREP). Information came from two general sources. The General Staff briefed the local and international press on a daily basis, and one of the attaches (usually Riemensnider because he remained for some time the only person in DAO who spoke French) attended the briefing. In addition, FANK had expanded the activities of their War Room, renamed it the Joint Operations Center, and placed it under the supervision of Brigadier General Pok Sam An. The U.S. attaches had access to this center at any time. When the augmentees arrived from MACV, the operation center became, for those assigned to work with Barringer on Army matters, practically speaking their place of duty. They would go every day to get the information available and come back to the Embassy and turn it into a report. Obviously, they were in no

position to seriously challenge the statements made by the Cambodians. It was a situation which did not improve except as the quality of the Cambodian effort improved with better internal communication, and higher professional standards. The other principal activity of the officer from DIA was to debrief, on behalf of the U.S. intelligence community, those Khmer officials who had been cooperating with the Viet Cong in the supply operations through Cambodia.

The first Naval Attache ever resident in Phnom Penh was Lt. Commander Clyde A. Bonar, USN. He arrived on 20 May 1970 by way of CINCPAC and Saigon. It was about a week before he met the Commander of the Navy at a social function hosted by the Air Force. Riemensnider suggested that Bonar attend because Sarendy was expected to be there. After this first meeting, he began to see the Navy on a daily basis. There, he received a daily briefing on the Navy situation: the status of ships and craft, their locations, etc. In addition, he participated, in the weeks immediately after his arrival, in the preparation of the daily situation report.

Military assistance activities for ALUSNA began with getting answers to numerous questions from the Navy and MACV about the Cambodian Navy. He spent a long session with Sarendy going through their records in order to account for the ships and craft supplied to Cambodia prior to 1963 by the U.S. There had been several instances of U.S. craft wandering into Cambodia from South Vietnam and being captured. The U.S. wanted to know about them and to get them back if possible. Sarendy began to pass lists of needed equipment to the U.S. through Bonar. As the only Naval officer present in Phnom Penh, Bonar continued to work on military assistance matters pertaining to the Navy, in addition to his general reporting activities. This went on until early 1971, when a Naval officer was assigned for military assistance purposes.

During the month of May, the duties of the DAO with respect to military assistance remained unchanged. The office supplied information: could the Cambodians use this or that type weapon? What about the POL situation? DAO arranged for clearance for incoming

aircraft from Saigon, coordinated their arrivals with the Cambodians, and verified manifests. The DAO did not participate in program development; these decisions were made elsewhere.

On 23 May 1970, Colonel William H. Pietsch, III, USA arrived in Phnom Penh as replacement for Colonel Le Comte. After several days to orient Pietsch, Barringer returned to Bangkok. On 20 June 1970, Pietsch, after a series of personal difficulties, was reassigned, and Colonel Barringer returned from Bangkok to function as Acting DATT/ARMA until the arrival of Colonel Harry O. Amos, USA, on 10 September 1970.

#### *Initial Military Assistance and Lon Nol's First Formal Request*

The uncertainties, difficulties, and confusion which marked formulation of U.S. policy toward the Khmer Republic are nowhere better depicted than in the various efforts to formalize the U.S. military assistance program for the FANK during the spring and summer of 1970. Some of the factors which lead to this state of affairs were:

1. A U.S. desire to deal with the Khmer as a sovereign entity, capable of developing and articulating their own needs.
2. The lack of a mission in country which could exercise anything more than the most general sort of influence on and evaluation of the FANK requests and in turn, what the FANK did with the assistance once received.
3. A desire to "...keep Cambodia from becoming another Vietnam".
4. A desire to limit the amount of assistance as much as possible, because U.S. resources were in fact limited, and because the U.S. considered the prospects for survival of the Khmer Republic to be highly questionable.
5. The above inhibited the U.S. from being completely open with the Khmer as to exactly what they could expect.
6. The lack of reality on the part of Lon Nol as to what the FANK could actually absorb and effectively use in the near term.

7. The difficulty, generated by Lon Nol's independence, in coming to an understanding with the Khmer as to exactly which units would receive the limited U.S. aid.

Whatever the problems, efforts to formalize the various projects to help the Cambodian forces and convert these into a coherent program began in Washington in April 1970, with consideration of Lon Nol's initial request. It asked for help in the formation of a force of 400,000 and for assistance in bringing some of the Khmer Krom troops, then under U.S. control in South Vietnam, to Cambodia for integration into the FANK. Astounding as the figure of four hundred thousand may have appeared to the U.S. at the time, it must be remembered that it was itself part of an even larger force, as conceived by Lon Nol. A document published by the Ministry National Defense in Phnom Penh in October 1970, and approved by Lon Nol shows that the FANK were to comprise two categories of forces:

1. Territorial Forces	210,000	
2. Maneuver Forces	400,000	
	Army	350,000
	Air Force	25,000
	Navy	25,000
<hr/>		
TOTAL:	610,000	

In addition, the plan called for 53,000 Para-military or self defense forces.<sup>1</sup>

Kissinger asked for a quick interagency study of the Lon Nol request, and assigned Larry Lynn and Bob Sansom from the NSC Staff to pull the report together. Lynn formed an ad-hoc working group consisting

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<sup>1</sup>Government of Cambodia, Strength and Organization of the Khmer Armed Forces, Phnom Penh, 4 October 1970.

of: Major Jerry Britton USA, OASD/ISA; Colonel Harry O. Amos, USA, OJCS J-5; there was also State Department and CIA representation.

Initial efforts of the working group were to get some clear idea of exactly what the Cambodian armed forces consisted of after a four-year absence of U.S. observers, and four years of communist military assistance.

This survey would provide a basis for answers to the questions:

1. What, if any, assistance could the Khmer make use of without the presence of U.S. advisers?
2. What chances were there that the Cambodian Army would be in existence long enough for even the first shipment to arrive?

The very pessimistic situation reports coming out of Phnom Penh, and the general lack of precise information about Cambodia and their armed forces provided a general atmosphere in which the working group found it difficult to concentrate on specifics. This was further complicated by those members whose job it was to provide the political input. They argued the desirability of taking no action on the request, since it was not clear that Lon Nol was the leader the U.S. should be dealing with; there were others, perhaps, who could facilitate the return to the scene of Sihanouk. Besides, there was no assurance that Lon Nol, if left to his own devices, would prove to be the top man. His military and pro-American backgrounds were well known. Dealing with him would not only solidify his position but propel Cambodia into the war at a time when the Khmer should be trying to regain their neutrality.

The military point of view argued that the Khmer were not only non-communist, but were traditional enemies of the North Vietnamese; that the change in government had in fact reflected a large measure of genuine opposition to Sihanouk over this question. From the U.S. point of view, the situation offered an opportunity to change Cambodia from a cooperating sanctuary for the North Vietnamese Army to an ally, willing to help by at least ceasing to ship war materials through its

ports to the communists in South Vietnam. The intelligence holdings were of little value, proving once again how difficult it is to bring the U.S. bureaucracy up to date on a question which is not worked continuously. By the time the group was meeting, Colonel Le Comte was back in the Pentagon, and available to answer questions. His lack of knowledge about the Cambodian Army after four months there was eloquent testimony to how difficult it was in the Sihanouk days for any attache, save perhaps the French, to learn anything useful about the armed forces of that country.

The immediate question concerning the possibility of Phnom Penh falling in the next few weeks was resolved by the group in the negative; but, not on the basis of what it knew about the fighting qualities of the Khmer. Rather, the group reasoned that regardless of their success in the field against the Khmer, the North Vietnamese would be reluctant to occupy Phnom Penh or permit the Viet Cong to do so while the internal political situation still did not rule out the return of Sihanouk and, in view of the obvious opposition of the Cambodian people to such a prospect. Furthermore, the rainy season would set in shortly; its effects would be most pronounced in the regions to the south and southeast of Phnom Penh (the Mekong Delta actually commences in Phnom Penh, where the river drops to elevations so near to sea level as to cause it to divide into the Mekong and the Bassac Rivers) where the significant moves against the Khmer would have to originate. Once the flooding had become general, this would work to further inhibit communist military moves toward the capital.

As for the capacity of the Cambodian army to absorb military assistance without the help of U.S. advisers, Colonel Amos argued that the Khmer clearly had some capacity to do this. The level of ignorance around the table was so great that someone suggested that if given a U.S. 2½ ton truck, the Cambodians would not even know how to drive it. Based on his own background in Cambodian matters, and his discussions with Le Comte, it was evident to Amos that the Cambodians could not only make use of some military assistance, but could expand the size of their armed forces as well.

A force of 400,000 was clearly a pipe dream, from a practical military point of view. Politically, however, it reflected a certain logic on the part of Lon Nol, expressed by the following equation:

$$\frac{400,000}{\text{the population of Cambodia}} = \text{more or less} \frac{1,000,000 \text{ RVNAF}}{\text{the population of RVN}}$$

At that time, and in the real world, Amos was convinced that the Cambodians could make use of light, unsophisticated weapons and equipment of the general types they were already familiar with, and at the same time they could double the size of the force from some thirty to some sixty-five thousand; the Khmer could proceed with this sort of program immediately and without the help of U.S. advisers. In time, given the manpower resources available to them, the Cambodian Army could be greater than 65,000.

The drafts prepared by the working group were, in effect, a series of individual efforts taken by Lynn and Sansom for their use in writing something for Kissinger. The final paper was not seen by the working group as such. It appears to have been used for background in the Presidential decision.

#### The Form of the Assistance Program

At this time the military assistance program focused on three main activities:

1. The providing to the Cambodians of ammunition, weapons, and other equipment from captured communist stocks, from stocks excess to the needs of MACV, and from funds made available by Presidential determination. For the remainder of FY70, these amounted to about \$9 million, later increased to above \$10 million.
2. The transfer of certain ethnic Khmer (Khmer Krom) units and personnel, then under the control of the U.S. Special Forces in Vietnam, to Cambodia and their incorporation

into the expanding Cambodian Army. The question of force development was not addressed formally in these initial weeks of the program.

3. The establishment, in the Embassy in Phnom Penh, of a military assistance management activity separate from the Department of Defense: The Office of the Politico-Military Counselor (POL/MIL).

*The Office of the Politico-Military Counselor (POL/MIL)*

The office of the POL/MIL Counselor was established in the Embassy in Phnom Penh in response to national policy decisions taken during the period immediately following the change in Cambodian government of 18 March 1970. The purpose of the office was to manage the military assistance program for Cambodia.

At a White House meeting in early April 1970, the President announced that he had decided to establish a modest military assistance program for Cambodia, and to put a civilian in charge of it. The President asked for recommendations as to who the civilian head of the Cambodia program should be.

After discussions between Secretary Laird and the Chairman of the JCS, the White House was asked if the civilian nominee might be a retired military officer. Brigadier General Alexander M. Haig, speaking for the White House, replied in the affirmative, provided, he said, that the nominee was someone already retired, and not someone retired tomorrow by DOD for the purpose. With this in mind, the DOD nomination to the White House was Jonathan F. Ladd, former Colonel, U.S. Army, who had retired from active duty in January 1970.

Colonel Ladd's early military assignments included anti-guerrilla operations in the Philippines and duty on General MacArthur's staff. In this latter assignment, he met and worked closely with 1st Lt. Alexander M. Haig. In 1962 Ladd was an adviser to an ARVN Infantry Division, and from 1966 to 1968 he commanded Special Forces Groups in Okinawa and South Vietnam.



In early May, Ladd was contacted in California by the Office of the Army Chief of Staff to determine his interest in an appointment in the Department of State. He subsequently agreed to go to Washington to discuss the question. Meetings were initially with General Haig and Dr. Kissinger. Haig had just returned from a trip to Phnom Penh, and the outlook for the Cambodian cause at MACV, CINCPAC, and in Washington was very bleak. There were many who believed that the Communist attacks against Cambodian forces would lead, in a matter of weeks, to the overrun of Phnom Penh. Ladd was told that he would have very little to work with. Kissinger then accompanied Ladd to a meeting with President Nixon. The President indicated that he -- the U.S. -- was not interested in the political fate of any one Cambodian; it was not important whether the leader we dealt with was Lon Nol or not, so long as Cambodia remained friendly, and on our side. The program should be as modest as possible, designed simply to keep Cambodia alive. Ladd was told that he was expected to deal directly with the Cambodian Chief of State, and the senior U.S. military commanders in the Pacific area. When Ladd told Haig and Kissinger that he did not want the job if Cambodia was to become another Vietnam, the answer was no ...Cambodia was not to become another Vietnam, with a large U.S. military presence. The U.S. would help the Cambodians to help themselves; but, after the U.S.-SVN withdrawal from Cambodia on June 30, 1970, they might collapse anyway.

Kissinger had arranged for Ladd to meet with State Department officials, since it was the plan that he serve with State in the status of a Foreign Service Officer while in Phnom Penh. The initial State meeting was with U.A. Johnson, Marshall Green, and Tom Pickering. Their intention was to install Ladd in the Embassy as Counselor for Politico-Military Affairs, with the rank of Foreign Service Reserve Officer-Grade 5. In the process of making up his mind, Ladd discussed the State proposition and White House guidance with a friend, recently retired from the Foreign Service. His friend pointed out that with so low a grade, it would be impossible for Ladd to do the job the President had in mind. Specifically, he would not be authorized access to Lon Nol and the senior officials in the Pacific Command;

nor, would he be able to communicate freely with Washington. Made aware of the State concept in a later meeting, both Haig and Kissinger agreed immediately that Grade 5 was much too low, and said they would talk to State. At a second meeting, this time with Secretary Rogers and U.A. Johnson, Ladd was told that he would have the same rank as the Chief of Mission, at that time, Charge Rives, FSO-2.

On his way to Cambodia in late May 1970, Ladd stopped for briefings and consultations at MACV. General Abrams said that as far as he could see, the U.S. program for Cambodia consisted essentially of providing them equipment and supplies as needed to keep them going. He saw little prospect for meaningful tactical cooperation with Cambodian forces, except in one place. This was in northeast Cambodia (Ratanakiri Province, directly west of Pleiku along French Indochina Route 19) where the Cambodian Army garrisons at Ba Kev and Labang Siek were considered highly exposed and effectively cut off from other Cambodian forces and the capital to the south and southwest. General Abrams was concerned that if those forces remained in place after the withdrawal of U.S. forces to South Vietnam there would be no way to help them, and they would undoubtedly be overrun. While not a large force, the several battalions in Ratanakiri comprised significant portions of the Cambodian Army at that time. Thus, General Abrams was convinced that the only solution for these garrisons was to evacuate them east into South Vietnam, for later return to government controlled areas of Cambodia farther south. The primary problem was getting Lon Nol to agree to the evacuation, and General Abrams wanted Ladd to persuade Lon Nol of the necessity of doing this before the end of June.

For the supply program, General Abrams asked that Ladd work directly with Major General Raymond C. Conroy, USA, the MACV J-4. By this time General Conroy had already established in the J-4 section an activity known as the "Cambodia Special Support Detachment." Because of the preoccupation of the J-3 section with the cross-border operation, General Abrams passed most of the MACV staff activity relating to Cambodia and assistance to the Cambodian armed forces to General Conroy. It was the J-4 section which did the contingency planning

for the possible evacuation of Ratanakiri. It was, therefore, the Special Support Group (SSG) which assembled and dispatched supplies and equipment to Phnom Penh by air and by ship -- up the Mekong. Up to that point, deliveries had consisted primarily of ammunition, medical supplies, and equipment captured during the cross-border operation, especially the AK-47 rifle, already in the hands of the Cambodian Army. Also there had been shipments of spare parts for U.S. weapons and vehicles still in Cambodian hands from the days of the U.S. MAAG prior to 1964.

Ladd arrived in Phnom Penh in early June 1970. Conditions and procedures in the Embassy were more crowded and more hectic than ever; but the policy of low profile resisted change. Ladd was met at the airport by Rives, driving the old Checkers limousine himself -- it was the driver's day off. Every square foot of the office space was now occupied by the growing numbers of personnel, while the "Residence" stood completely empty, awaiting the arrival of an Ambassador. Packing boxes were everywhere, and the one good chair in Rives now very crowded office belonged to whomever got to it first. Although the DAO had a few maps, there was no operations center or room where the military situation was portrayed. Daily briefings of principal staff officers were not held. There were still no security guards (the U.S. Marine detachment arrived in late June) and visitors still wandered through.

Almost immediately after his arrival, Rives took Ladd to see Lon Nol; Haig had alerted Lon Nol to Ladd's arrival. After this initial courtesy call, Ladd began to see Lon Nol several times a week, usually in the company of Mr. John Stein, Embassy Consular Officer. It was during these initial visits that Lon Nol was urged repeatedly to evacuate the Cambodian forces from Ratanakiri. At first, Lon Nol refused to consider such a move, which, in his mind, could only be viewed by the Cambodian people as an act of weakness on the part of their leadership in turning over to the enemy an area -- albeit practically unpopulated -- equal to almost one quarter of the country. General Abrams continued to stress the necessity for evacuation in his communications to Ladd, and Ladd in his meetings with Lon Nol. Part of Lon Nol's hesitation

was based on his belief, according to Ladd, that President Nixon was not serious about his commitment to withdraw U.S. troops from Cambodia -- at least not by 30 June 1970.

About 20 June, however, Lon Nol sent Brigadier General Sak Sutsakhan to get Ladd at his quarters (by this time one of the bungalows at the Hotel Royale, where he could use the maps of Arnaud De Bouchegrave, the Time Inc. representative in Phnom Penh). At Lon Nol's house, maps spread out on the floor, Lon Nol authorized the withdrawal from Ratanakiri, and Ladd filled him in on the essentials of the ARVN/U.S. contingency plan prepared some time earlier by MACV. It would ensure the safe move of Cambodian military units, dependents, and refugees from Ratanakiri east into South Vietnam. The evacuation was successfully carried out during the period 24-27 June 1970.

While Ladd saw Lon Nol frequently, the majority of his time was taken up with problems relating to actual delivery and reception of military equipment and other assistance from Saigon to Phnom Penh. For this, he was in almost continuous conference and coordination with Brigadier Generals U Say and Tappanah Ngin, senior logistics officers for the Cambodian forces.

In order to deal with increasing demands surrounding the receipt and disposition of arriving shipments of assistance, Ladd asked Haig for the immediate assignment of a small staff. This produced two active duty military officers and two enlisted men, who were assigned to the Embassy.

Major William Addington, USA was working in Hq. MACV and was discovered in the snack bar. The story is told that during a coffee break he happened to say something to someone in French. A third party, overhearing the conversation, asked Addington if he spoke French. When Addington said yes, he did, to some extent, his interrogator said, "Come with me, Major." The next thing he knew he was in Phnom Penh.

Lt. Colonel Laurence B. Bonner, USA was on leave settling his family in Florida, prior to an unaccompanied tour in Laos. Within minutes after his telephone was finally installed, he was called by office of the local county sheriff, and told to get in touch with the

Pentagon. With only the barest of information, Bonner was told to take the next flight to Travis AFB, and from there the first available transportation to CINCPAC. In Hawaii, he was briefed on the details of the Cambodia program, and where he would be working. Admiral McCain told Bonner that he would be working for Ladd, that the U.S. wanted to see what could be done on a low-profile basis to equip and train the Cambodian forces. He warned Bonner of an impending struggle between the Defense Department and the State Department over the direction of U.S. policy for Cambodia. Finally, he asked Bonner to try to find out what was going on in Cambodia.

Together with the two enlisted men, Major Addington was assigned fulltime to meeting and inventoring the incoming shipments of assistance. The normal procedure was to check the manifest (aircraft or ship), obtain a signature from Cambodian authorities, and turn the shipment over to the Cambodians for disposition. Bonner, who was fluent in French from previous assignments, began to work directly with Ladd on general policy matters, and to accompany him on visits to Lon Nol and to other conferences.

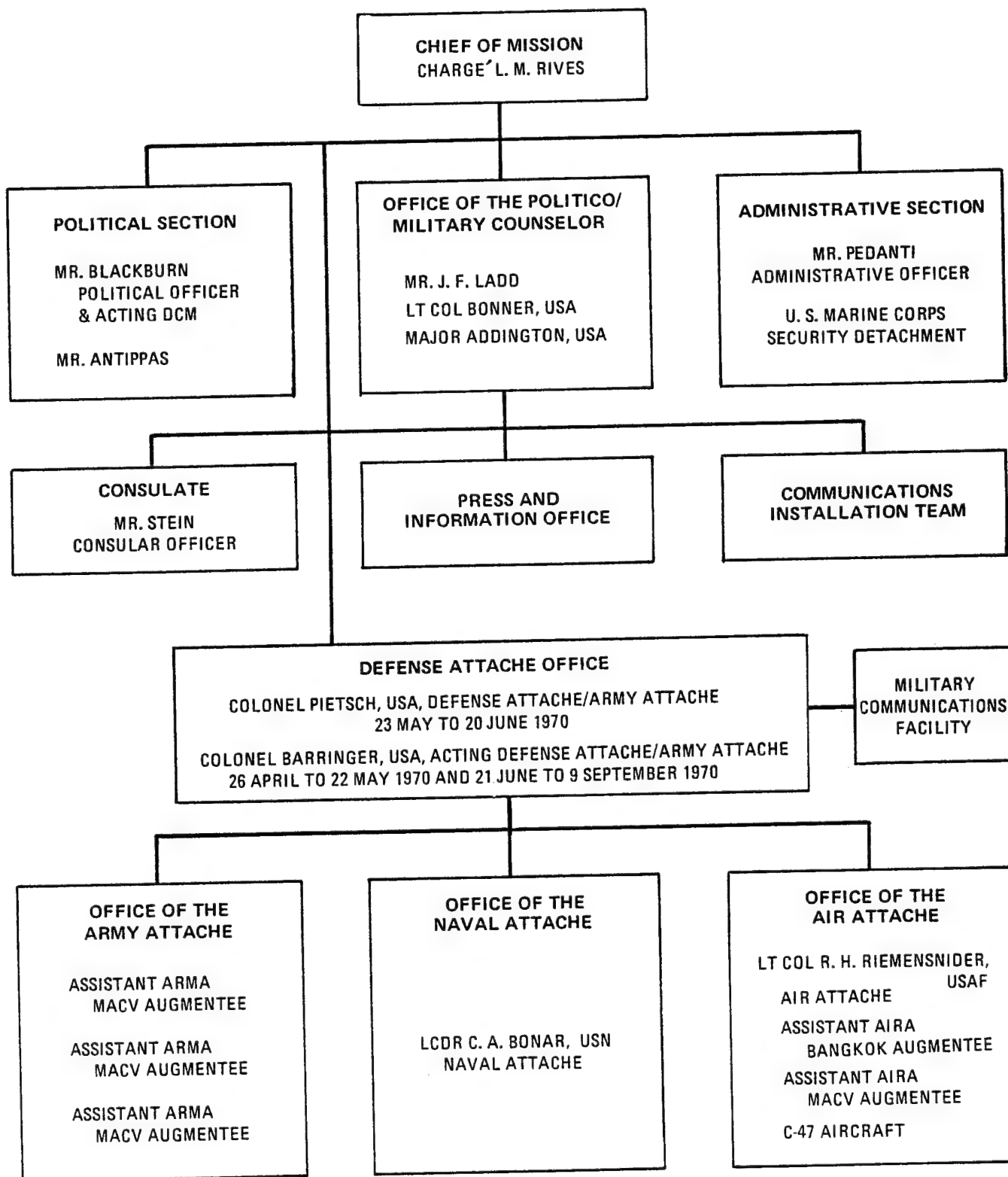
*Military Activities and Patterns of Coordination  
by End of the Incursion*

By the end of June, the Embassy and its military components had grown considerably in size and activity. (Chart 2 )

With full-time assistance to Ladd, the Army attache personnel phased out of the checking of incoming supplies, and the DAO phased out of the coordination of shipment deliveries. The Air Force and Naval Attache personnel continued to assist Ladd with matters pertaining to their respective services, but in those early weeks assistance to the Cambodian Air Force and Navy was negligible.

Contacts for Army attache personnel in particular centered in the Operations Center and with the J-2 section at the FANK General Staff. Use began to be made of the C-47 aircraft to improve understanding of the geography in the combat areas. There was no program of general

Chart 2 – Organization of the U. S. Embassy, Phnom Penh in July 1970



attache travel, although some trips were made.

The POL/MIL Office became a very busy place in July as the size and complexity of the military assistance program grew, and as improved communications into the Embassy permitted everyone to begin to ask all of the questions they had in mind. In addition to the military facility (by now known as the white elephant) POL/MIL was tied in by telephone with the RVNAF mission recently established in Phnom Penh. POL/MIL office space was found in a converted bathroom on the first floor. There was no safe for the usually highly classified documents POL/MIL worked with. When it was necessary to leave the office, documents were gathered up, put into a cardboard box and shoved in on the floor of the white elephant.

Activity centered around two primary activities: find out what was on hand in the FANK; and, what would be the force structure for the FANK? At that time the force structure question, for all the plans of Lon Nol, was primarily one of just how much the U.S. had to give, and which units could use it most effectively. The FANK had more than enough people. Both parties agreed that first priority should go to the needs of the battalions evacuated from Labangsiek and to the Khmer Krom units moving from South Vietnam. The second priority for force development went to an additional group of battalion size units moved to South Vietnam, where they were given about eight weeks of training and fitted out with arms and equipment according to a modified TO&E, based on the ARVN Infantry Battalion.

Contacts continued on a frequent basis between Ladd and Lon Nol, some time at Lon Nol's initiative, and some time at Ladd's initiative. Lon Nol often wanted to see Ladd to relay to the U.S. some additional request for military equipment; Ladd's visits were often to report the status of these special requests. They also served the purpose of reassuring Lon Nol of President Nixon's continued interest in the success and well being of the Khmer cause. In July, Lon Nol began to make plans for a military offensive to open and better secure the land route to Kompong Cham along Routes 6 and 7. Much of the discussion concerned the expected needs of the FANK for this coming operation, to be known

as CHENLA I. Lon Nol's discussions with Ladd were also wide-ranging, and on more than one occasion, Ladd considered it appropriate to express the view that the activities of Lon Nol's younger brother, Lon Non, were complicating the Khmer efforts to come to grips with their situation.

Because no one really knew, and because no one wanted to commit the U.S. in advance, it was the practice not to tell or try to tell the Khmer exactly what the extent of the U.S. assistance program would be. In an effort to get some idea, Sak Sutsakhan and Mao Sum Kem went to Bonner's quarters on several evenings to brief him and to discuss the FANK concept for the coming CHENLA operation. Based on the reaction of Bonner, and on the discussions with Ladd, the Khmer were able to form some opinion as whether the resources would be sufficient.

As the plans for CHENLA were completed, Sak Sutsakhan developed a briefing for the operation, and rehearsed it with Bonner. When Admiral McCain made his first visit to Phnom Penh, he heard the briefing, presented by Sak in French and interpreted by Bonner. The concept for the operation appeared to have been well thought out, of reasonable, attainable objective, and Admiral McCain expressed the view that it would be a good idea. The operation, conducted during the next two months, was generally successful. In October, Bonner and Sak went to Hawaii to Brief Admiral McCain on the results.

In addition to his contacts with Lon Nol, Ladd normally traveled to Saigon once each week to confer with and brief General Abrams on the situation in Cambodia and to discuss questions of military assistance for the FANK.

#### *The Military Equipment Delivery TEAM -- CAMBODIA (METDC)*

METDC, when established in early 1971, was a continuation of activities being performed in the J-4 section of MACV in Vietnam and of activities being performed by the POL/MIL Office in the Embassy in Phnom Penh. The establishment was prompted by a switch in funding of the Cambodia program from Presidential contingency funds to funding



from the Foreign Assistance Act, and accorded with the long held desire on the part of the Department of Defense, the JCS, and CINCPAC to have formal control of the program.

The funding problem was not only one of supplying equipment for an expanding Cambodian force, but the even more expensive item of furnishing ammunition to support generalized fighting which gave every indication of continuing long after termination of the cross-border operation. There were two funding options. In August 1970, Secretary Laird told Colonel Amos that the President and he would have preferred to fund the Cambodia program from the DOD Budget, making it a MASF Program (Military Assistance Service Funded) as was the case in Vietnam. However, the general outcry in the United States and in the Congress against the cross-border operation made it clear to the President that a move to place the Cambodia program on the same basis as the Vietnam program would cause unacceptable problems with Congress.

Thus, the decision was made to seek funds for Cambodia in the Foreign Assistance Act appropriation, making it a MAP program. And, in the case of Cambodia, there were some very specific restrictions in the legislation on the President's execution of the program. The furnishing of U.S. military advisers to the Cambodian forces was expressly forbidden. There was a ceiling of 200 on the number of U.S. citizen employees in Cambodia, and a ceiling of 85 on third-country nationals employed by the U.S. and working in Cambodia.

The first commander of MEDTC was Brigadier General Theodore C. Mataxis, USA. He had had previous adviser assignments in India, Vietnam, and Iran. His combat assignments in Vietnam were with the 101st Airborne and Americal Divisions. He was acting commander of the Americal Division in Vietnam in mid-January 1971 when told, one day, to report to Saigon for immediate transfer.

On reporting, General Abrams greeted Mataxis with the news that he was, as of then, the Commander of the MEDT in Cambodia. He said that the program for Cambodia had grown to the point that the people in Phnom Penh could no longer handle it. MACV had been doing something to promote force development in the Cambodian forces; now Mataxis would

be under McCain; MACV would have nothing further to do with the Cambodia program; and that he, Abrams, was glad that CINCPAC would be responsible.

When Mataxis tried to ask questions, Abrams replied, "Don't ask me any questions; you know what to do. You have \$180 million for this year and \$220 million for next year." He added that there was a situation in the Embassy in Phnom Penh which would not make his job any easier: a political fight which reflected the differences in Washington between the State and Defense Departments over the conduct of U.S. policy for Cambodia.

MEDTC was initially authorized 60 officers and men. Many of those initially assigned came from those MACV personnel who had already been working in the J-4 Special Support Group. Of this 60, 44 personnel were stationed in Saigon, and 14 were assigned to the U.S. Embassy in Phnom Penh. In May 1971, team strength was increased to 113, with 23 in Phnom Penh. In August 1971, the distribution was 50 in Phnom Penh and 63 in Saigon.

The formal mission of MEDTC was:

1. To determine the needs of the Cambodian military forces.
2. To arrange for the shipment and delivery of equipment and materials.
3. To insure that the equipment and materials were used in the manner prescribed by law.

#### *United States Influence on FANK Decisions*

The question was not whether the FANK would be amenable to U.S. influence; in general, the FANK were receptive to U.S. suggestions on military matters, and many of the senior officials of the FANK would have welcomed U.S. advisers. Even under such favorable circumstances, the degree of U.S. influence was a function of both the U.S. desire to have influence, and the presence in Phnom Penh of a U.S. representation appropriate to the influence sought.

The U.S. urging was certainly instrumental in Lon Nol's decision to evacuate the garrisons from Ratanakiri Province, and particularly

to do this before the end of the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Cambodia. Here, there was no question on the part of the U.S. what they wanted Lon Nol to do, and there was an appropriate U.S. representation in Phnom Penh to make this U.S. view known. The combination of General Abram's expressed desires and Ladd's White House connection was more than sufficient to get Lon Nol's agreement to what was a difficult course of action for him.

In the more general field of military activities, particularly force development, the U.S. was not particularly effective because, in the first place, it did not want to get involved in the details of such matters. Ladd's White House guidance, his own expressed feelings, the concept of "low profile" are all reflective of this aspect of U.S. policy. To the extent that the U.S. did not want to get involved, the FANK naturally went their own way, developing their own objectives and programs in their own way. On the specific question of which FANK unit received what U.S. equipment, there simply were never enough U.S. military personnel in Phnom Penh to maintain all of the low-level contacts which would have been necessary to stay current.

Finally, there was the Khmer point of view. The Khmer did not go to war against the Communists in order to please the U.S. In fact, the actions taken by the Khmer to remove Sihanouk from the political scene, and to turn completely around Cambodian policy with respect to the war, reflected the feelings of a majority of the Khmer, and would perhaps have taken place without the added irritant of VC/NVA presence on Cambodian territory. But however that may be, it is an inescapable fact that behind the contact and cooperation with the U.S. there was a Cambodia with its own political dynamic. More significant for U.S. policy, the FANK were an integral part of the political reality of the new Khmer government and of the way that Lon Nol retained his power base. It did make a difference to Lon Nol which unit received the limited supplies of arms; he had his own reasons, commanders in whom he had more confidence than others, commanders who were more loyal to him personally than others, etc. For these reasons, because of his personality, and in the absence of anyone in the U.S. mission who could in a sense spend full time with Lon Nol, the FANK were never completely

free from the sort of outside tinkering by Lon Nol which would have made difficult the exercise of influence by even a large and well organized MAAG.

Nor did Lon Nol, or the FANK for that matter, simply want to fight a war. There were, to them, legitimate and important social objectives to be accomplished at the same time.

### *Critical Analysis*

When diplomatic relations were restored between the United States and Cambodia in 1969 the Department of Defense was presented with an opportunity to reestablish military contacts after a break of over four years. Even within the context of a U.S. policy of "low profile" there was every reason to have a well-staffed and supported Defense Attache Office (DAO) as the very minimum military representation. The war in Vietnam continued unabated; and, the enemy use of Cambodian territory was growing and becoming a more significant asset to him every day.

This opportunity was not fully exploited by the U.S. The number of military attaches envisioned for the office prior to the change in government was not sufficient to provide Washington and the Pacific Command with an appraisal of the military situation in Cambodia appropriate to the events in Southeast Asia at that time. After the change in government on 18 March 1970, the DAO, for all its heroic efforts, was reduced -- during a critical six weeks -- to little more than a message center.

Moreover, it was a message center that could not communicate. Although the State Department was responsible, the Department of Defense must accept its share of the blame for the totally inadequate communications facilities established in the first place, and for the apparent lack of any specific contingency plan to reinforce both the personnel and the communication capabilities of the DAO immediately after 18 March 1970.

It is not as though the U.S. and the military services had no warning. Sihanouk left Cambodia on January 6, 1970. We had, therefore,

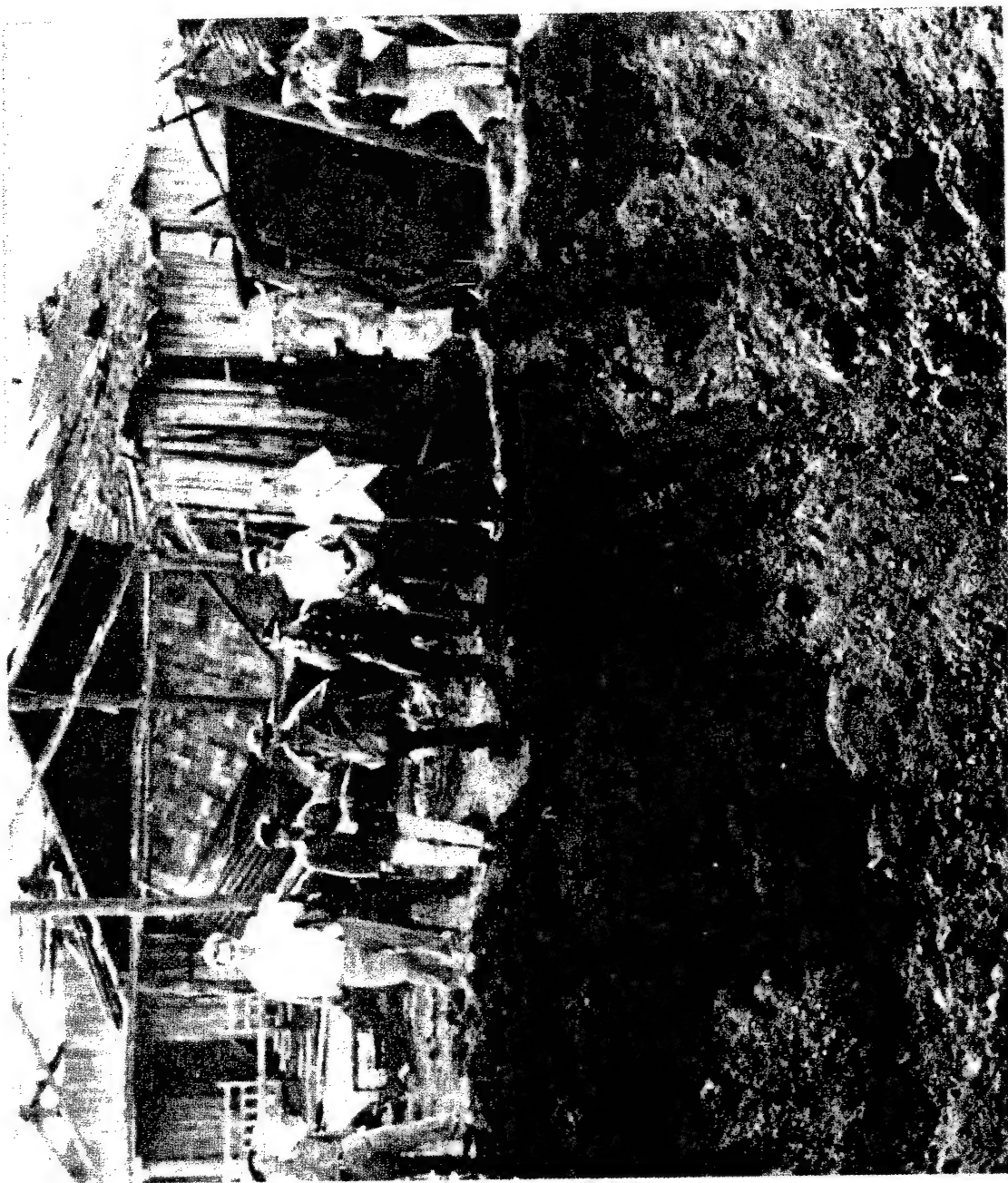
a very good signal, more than two months ahead of time, that something was going to happen. Just as U.S. policy had two months to prepare for change, so the Services had time which could have been put to better use. The Army and the Navy are to be faulted for not having military attaches present for duty in Cambodia on 18 March.

A second point, also related to communication, was that of proper language facility. It is difficult to understand why anyone was sent to the DAO in Phnom Penh, in those early days, who did not speak either French or Khmer. There was at that time simply no other way to talk to the vast majority of FANK personnel, no matter how much some of them may have wished to be able to speak English.

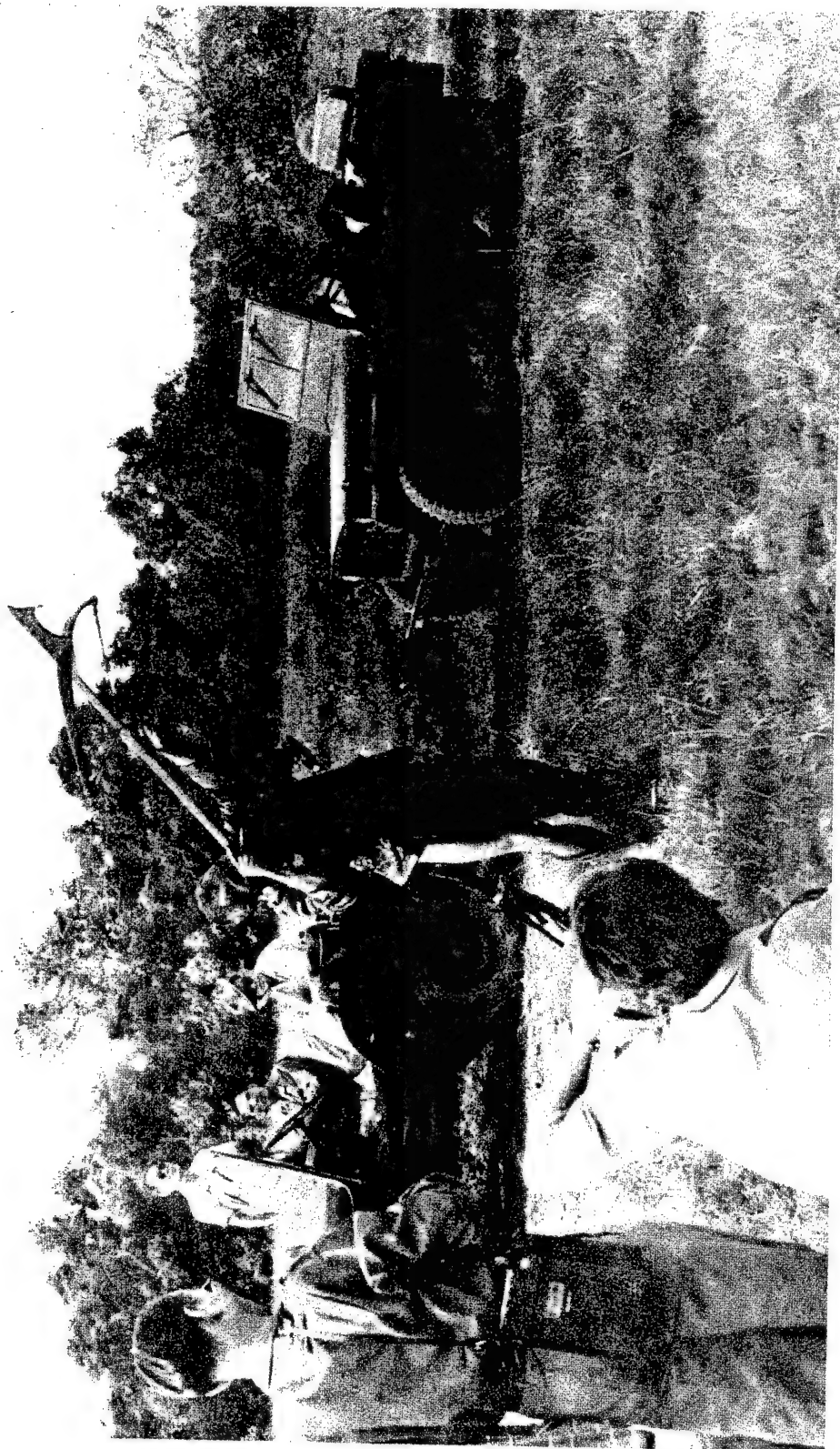
However, none of this detracts in any way from the effort and dedication of those few who were there and outdoing themselves during a very difficult period. This is particularly true of the Air Attache, who had to try to do it all, and by himself, for six weeks. In fact, the functioning and accomplishments of the military elements of the Embassy in Phnom Penh during this entire period constitute an excellent example of what can be accomplished by a few people while working under very unusual conditions.

But if the U.S. military effort was not as well served in early 1970 by the DAO in Phnom Penh as it might have been, there was one advantage, however unintended. The confusion and inadequate resources in the U.S. Embassy on 18 March are strong evidence that -- as the U.S. has consistently maintained -- the U.S. was not in any way involved in the change in government in Cambodia on that date.

The observations of the Embassy which suggest that the demonstrations in Phnom Penh prior to 18 March were organized by those who wanted to get rid of Sihanouk warrant a comment. Whether or not they were organized is not the only relevant question. Equally important is the reaction of the Khmer people following these demonstrations. Clearly, the twin move to get rid of Sihanouk and the Communist invaders struck a responsive chord in the general population. The rally to the colors by the thousands of young Khmer who sought to defend Cambodia against the double enemy of communism and North Vietnamese imperialism could not have been staged. It was spontaneous.

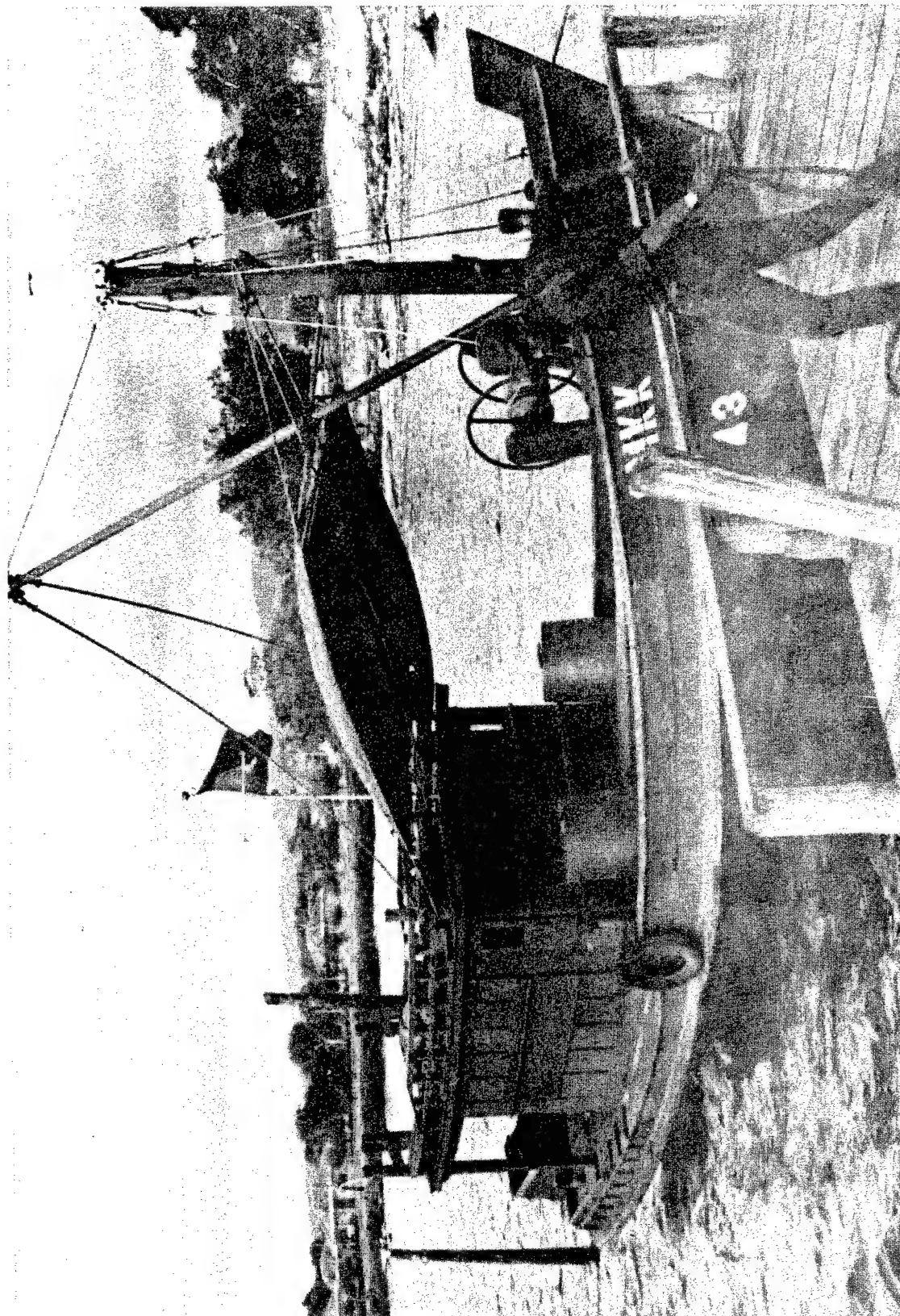


Visit to Mondolkiri Province  
Military Attaches and Reporters view bomb crater  
behind barracks at Camp Le Rolland  
November 22, 1969



Visit to Mondolkiri Province  
Military Attaches and Reporters take time out from the Twentieth Century  
to observe the employment of a more traditional weapons system  
November 22, 1969





Visit to Koh Kong Province  
Thai fishing boat converted to Cambodian Navy use  
February 1970

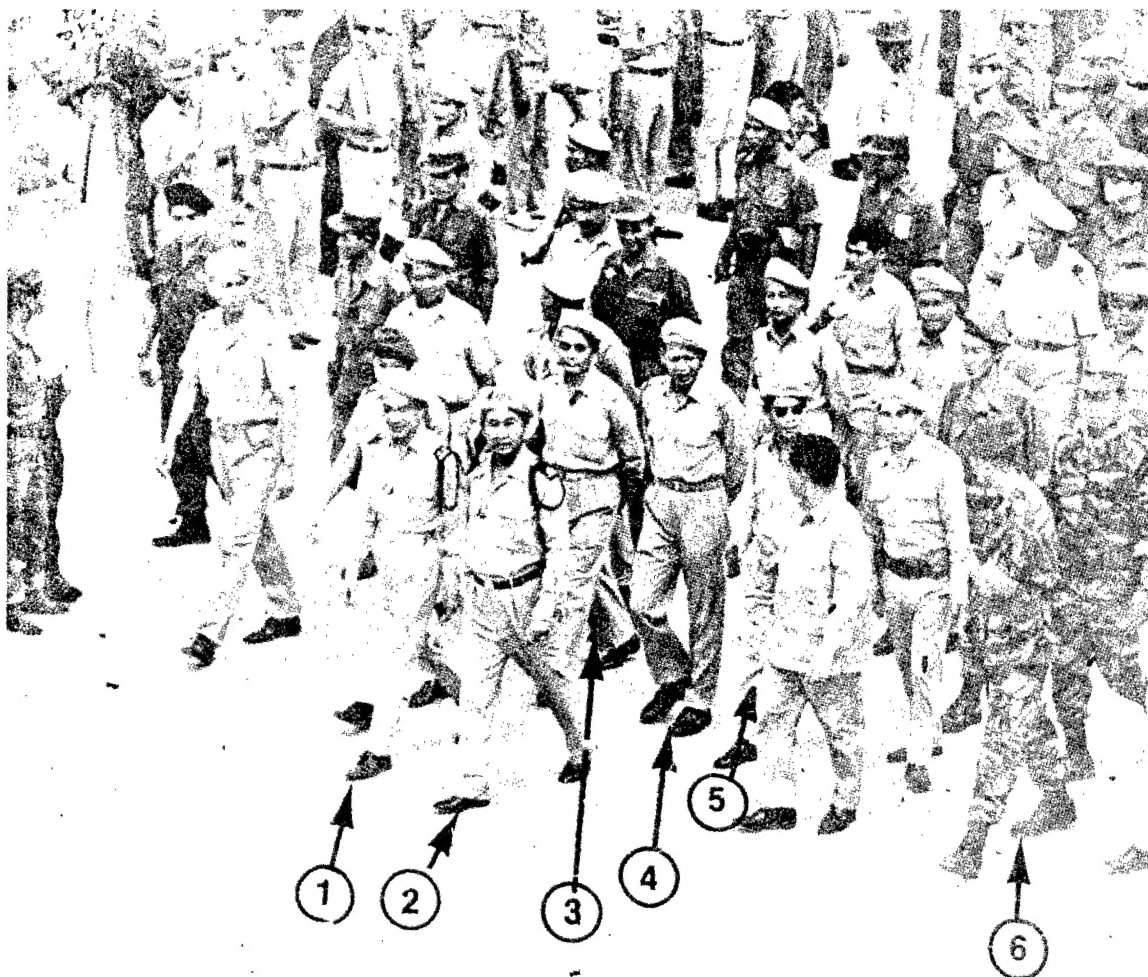




Visit to Chi Phu, Svay Rieng Province  
Military Attaches and Press assemble at Svay Rieng  
Military Headquarters en route to Chi Phu. Identified are:  
(1) Colonel Fan Moeung, local military commander, and  
(2) Colonel Khouroudeth, J-2 Cambodian General Staff  
6 April 1970



Chargé L. M. Rives, U.S. Embassy, Phnom Penh,  
boards the U.S. freighter "COLUMBIA EAGLE" at  
Sihanoukville (Kompong Som) on the day of its  
release by Cambodian authorities  
Early 1970



Demonstration to show support for new Cambodian Government  
after the ouster of Sihanouk

Phnom Penh, April 1970

Identified: (1) Sirik Matak (2) Lon Nol (3) U Say  
(4) Srey Sman (5) Sak Sutsakhan (6) Les Kosem



Lt. Colonel Riemensnider, USAF,  
Acting Defense Attache and Air Attache, U.S. Embassy, Phnom Penh  
and Lt. Colonel Norodom Vatvani, Khmer Air Force  
Photograph taken in 1972

## Glossary

ABN	Airborne
ACR	Armored Cavalry Regiment
ALC	Area Logistics Command
ALUSNA	U.S. Naval Attache
ARMA	U.S. Army Attache
ARVN	Army of the Republic of Vietnam
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CIDG	Civilian Irregular Defense Group
CINCPAC	Commander-In-Chief, Pacific
COMUSMACV	Commander, U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam
COSVN	Central Office (for) South Vietnam
DAO	Defense Attache Office
DATT	Defense Attache
DIA	Defense Intelligence Agency
DMAC	Delta Military Assistance Command
DMZ	Demilitarized Zone
DRV	Democratic Republic of (North) Vietnam
FANK	Forces Armées Nationales Khmères (Khmer Armed Forces after 18 March 1970)
FARK	Forces Armées Royales Khmères (Khmer Armed Forces prior to 18 March 1970)
FWMAF	Free World Military Assistance Forces
GVN	Government of (South) Vietnam
ICC	International Control Commission (First Indochina War)
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff
JGS	Joint General Staff
KKK	Khmer Kampuchea Krom

MAAG	Military Assistance Advisory Group
MACV	Military Assistance Command, Vietnam
MEDTC	Military Equipment Delivery Team, Cambodia
MR	Military Region
MRK	Marine Royale Khmère (Khmer Navy)
NLF	National Liberation Front
NVA	North Vietnamese Army
POL/MIL	Politico/Military Counselor
PRG	Provisional Revolutionary Government (Viet Cong)
RF/PF	Regional and Popular Forces
RVN	Republic of Vietnam
RVNAF	Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces
SEDOC	Section de Documentation (et Recherche)
SEATO	South East Asia Treaty Organization
TAOI	Tactical Area of Interest
TF	Task Force
UN	United Nations
USAF	United States Air Force
USIS	United States Information Service
USN	United States Navy
USOM	United States Operations Mission
VC	Viet Cong
VNAF	Vietnam Air Force
VNN	Vietnam Navy